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March 2012

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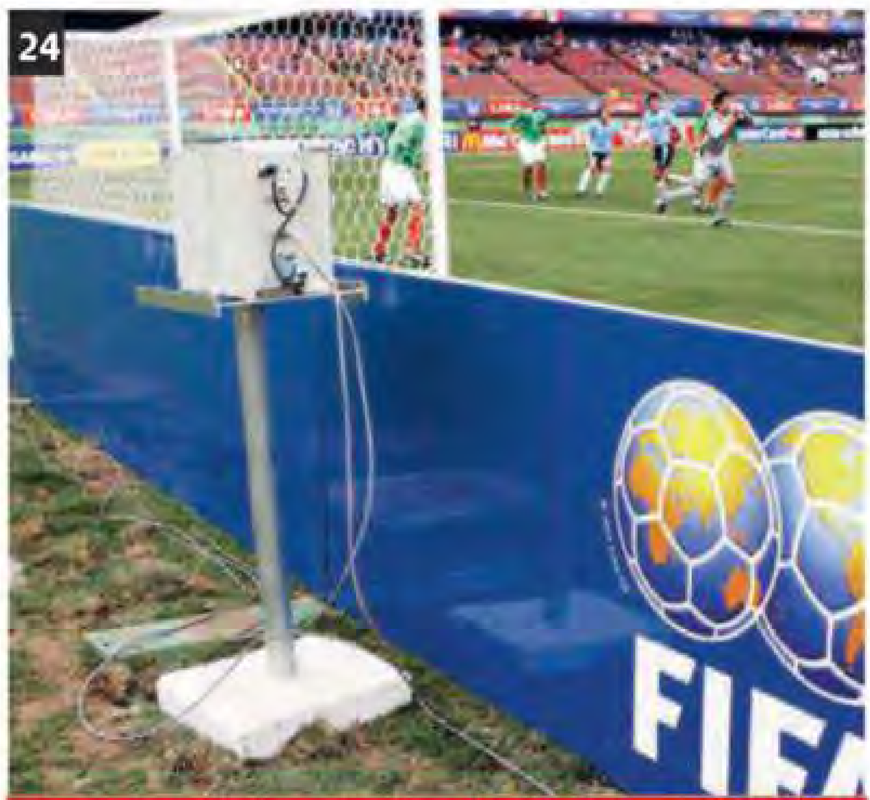

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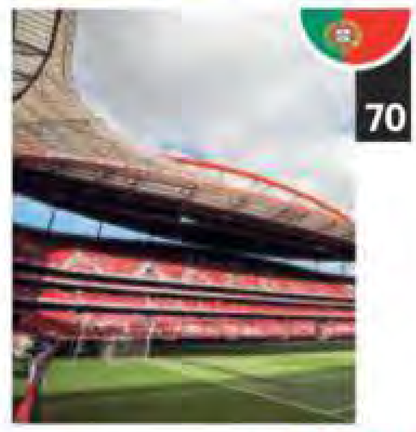

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

EQUATORIAL GUINEA...a Senegal fan watches as his team crash out of the African Nations Cup, in the group stage, against hosts Equatorial Guinea in Bata

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QATAR...Al Sadd players celebrate after scoring against Umm Salal in a league game in Doha

ITALY...two Chievo fans, flanked by security, attend their club's away fixture at Roma

ENGLAND...Blackburn Rovers' Steven Nzonzi (left) and Everton's Tim Cahill compete for the ball in a Premier League encounter

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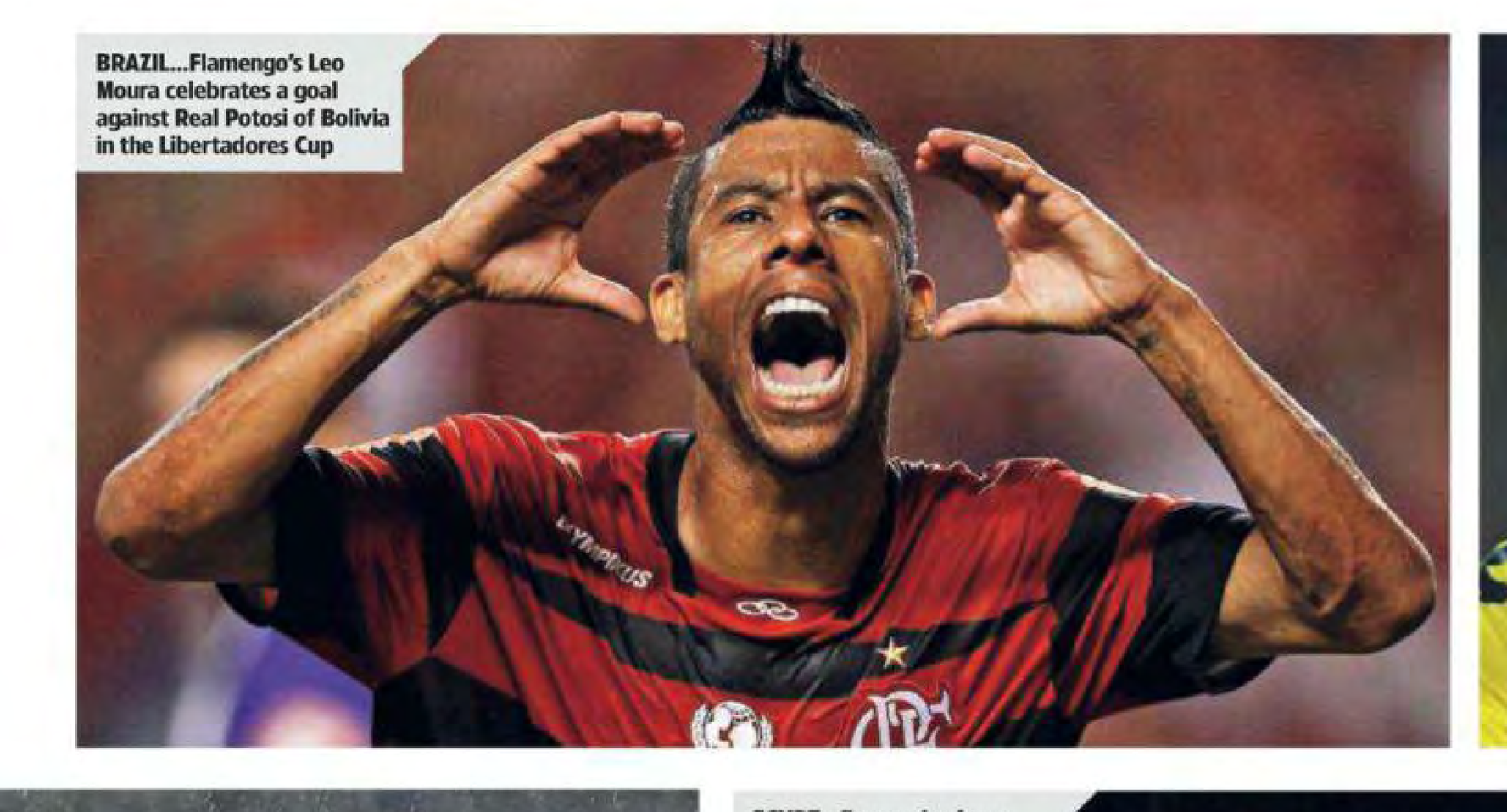

BRAZIL...Flamengo's Leo Moura celebrates a goal against Real Potosi of Bolivia in the Libertadores Cup

GERMANY...Borussia Dortmund's Shinji Kagawa keeps his eyes on the ball against Hoffenheim

EGYPT...flames rise from Cairo Stadium as a wave of incidents infiltrate football matches throughout Egypt

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

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FROM THE EDITOR

The lack of major deals in the January transfer window (compared to last year, at least) is the strongest sign yet that European clubs are adapting their spending to cope with UEFA's imminent Financial Fairplay regulations. Manchester City remain one of the exceptions; their director Brian Marwood argues the case for more time to adapt to the new rules (page 54). Whether or not you admire the "project" at City, they are hard to ignore and we turn the spotlight on them this month.

Elsewhere, we preview the Champions League knockout stage but our deadlines mean we cannot review the African Nations Cup in its entirety, so we will bring you the full story next month.

In the meantime, take time to reflect on the extraordinary progress of Equatorial Guinea (page 30), whose hired mercenaries have enjoyed success in the tournament but whose multiple nationalities may now come under more intense scrutiny.

Sadly, events elsewhere on the African continent this month have put matters into perspective.

> Whether or not you admire the "project" at Manchester City, they are hard to ignore

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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EGYPT

Football demands disaster leaves at

One of Africa's worst stadium disasters left at least 74 football fans dead and many questions unanswered after rioting at the end of an Egyptian league game in Port Said between Al Masry and champions Al Ahly.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter called on the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) to explain what went wrong at the Port Said Stadium, but it was unclear who would provide the answers as the entire EFA board was sacked by the Egyptian government in the immediate aftermath of the disaster – a move that could prompt FIFA to suspend Egypt from all international football activity if the world governing body interprets the EFA board sacking as government interference.

The Egyptian league was suspended indefinitely and a number of Al Ahly players – including Egypt internationals Mohamed Aboutrika, Emad Motaeb and Mohamed Barakat – announced their immediate retirement from football after they were caught up in the post-match riot.

Accusations of deliberate provocation and premeditation among the political and security spheres followed within hours of the disaster. Reports by witnesses that some of the most vicious attacks on Al Ahly fans had been launched by men armed with knives further fuelled the febrile atmosphere on the streets of a country struggling to move forward after the overthrow of president Hosni Mubarak a year ago.

Three days of national mourning were declared after the country's worst sporting disaster which also saw many hundreds of fans injured in the 25,000-capacity stadium and its surrounding streets.

Ironically, if Egypt's national team had qualified to defend their continental title at the African Nations Cup finals in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, it is unlikely that the match would have gone ahead at this time and place.

Mass violence

Several fan incursions had greeted the goals from home side Al Masry in their surprise 3-1 win over an Al Ahly side chasing an eighth successive league title. Thousands of fans then swarmed across the pitch at the final whistle. Security forces failed to react and, very quickly, it became clear that the fan invasion was not in celebration but intent on mass violence.

Security forces, while badly undermanned for a game that was always going to be tense, lacked not only competent leadership and co-ordination but also, apparently, the will to act. That failure to protect Al Ahly's players and fans sparked subsequent accusations of deliberate collusion with more sinister forces.

Unconfirmed reports said that the government had sacked security chiefs in the city within hours of the disaster and that

answers after Port Said stadium least 74 dead, hundreds injured

air force planes and/or helicopters had been despatched from Cairo to bring back the bodies of the dead and the injured. The Muslim Brotherhood, the largest parliamentary group after the recent elections, accused renegade members of the security forces of collusion in fomenting the violence. An emergency session of parliament was summoned to consider the disaster and the fall-out.

Presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi claimed those killed in Port Said were victims of "systematic chaos". He said: "What happened was black vengeance against the Al Ahly ultras because of their role in the revolution."

Al Ahly ultras

In December 2011, *World Soccer* reported on the role the Al Ahly ultras had played in giving advice and confidence to those taking part in last year's uprising against the Mubarak regime. One ultra said: "They would call us a violent gang. It wasn't just supporting a team, you were fighting a system and the country as a whole... the ultras taught us to speak our mind." Another added: "We are fighting them [the police] in every match. We know them. We know when they run, when we should make them run. We were teaching [the protesters] how to throw bricks."

Sports authorities in the coastal city had raised concerns about trouble ahead of the game because of crowd incidents at last season's meeting. Adding to the tension had been the recent appointment as coach by Al Masry of Hossam Hassan, who had been involved in a touchline clash with Al Ahly coach Manuel Jose when he was in charge of Zamalek. Al Ahly had started the game second in the table with 36 points, one behind Harras El Hodood but four ahead of Cairo rivals Zamalek.

According to a report from daily newspaper *Al Ahram*, Al Masry fans stormed the pitch immediately after the final whistle,

Panic...a flare is fired at spectators in Port Said

"chasing Ahly players and technical staff members who ran for their lives".

Al Ahly's players phoned the club's own television channel and radio stations to describe their fear amid the carnage and called for the authorities to intervene and protect them. Veteran playmaker Aboutrika told the club's TV channel: "The security forces left us, they did not protect us. One fan has just died in the dressing room in front of me."

Midfielder Barakat added: "People have died, we are seeing corpses now. There are no security forces or army personnel to protect us. It is our fault because we played that match. The authorities are afraid to cancel the league because they just care about money, they do not care about the lives of people."

Medhat El Esnawy, the manager of Port Said's El Amiry hospital, said that bodies of the dead and dying had been brought to his emergency department having been killed in a stampede and having died of suffocation.

The worst crowd disaster in Africa was in Accra, Ghana, on May 9, 2001 when 127 people died after a match between the country's two most successful football teams when Hearts of Oak beat visiting Asante Kotoko 2-1. Angry Kotoko fans threw plastic seats and bottles onto the pitch and police fired tear gas in response, provoking panic and a fatal stampede. Six police officers were later charged with 127 counts of manslaughter. WS

Fleeing...Al Ahly players run from the invading crowd

"Depending on the match situation, sometimes it's necessary to change the marking. And, as you have never been a player, you wouldn't know that"

Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos criticises Jose Mourinho in a training-ground spat

SPAIN

Pepe the villain as Madrid tires of Mourinho

By the end of the second leg of their Spanish Cup quarter-final against Barcelona, Real Madrid and Jose Mourinho had gone some way to mending their image with an impressive performance and a 2-2 draw at Camp Nou. But it might all have been too late.

For many, the lasting image of the latest *clasico* clash was the moment during the first leg in Madrid when Pepe stood on Lionel Messi's hand – an image that was splashed across the front page of every sports newspaper in Spain, on both sides of the Madrid-Barca divide.

That single image seemed, for many, to sum up Madrid's approach to the first leg: violent and, ultimately, pointless.

With Messi on the floor, Pepe glanced down, slowed his stride and then trod on the Argentinian's hand. Afterwards Mourinho was asked whether Pepe's actions were worthy of censor, to which he replied: "If it was deliberate". Few doubted that it was.

Two days later, Pepe issued a video apology in which he claimed that he had done so accidentally "and if Messi feels offended, I'm sorry". Yet the video almost made it worse and was an insult to add to the injury. Pepe's innocence was even harder to believe because of his past record. Likeable off the pitch, Pepe is transformed on it. No one could forget the time that he kicked and attacked a prostrate Javi Casquero during a game against Getafe.

The media described Pepe as a "disgrace", "unacceptable" and a "public danger". There may have been no surprises when this came from the Catalan press; what was different was that the Madrid media took the same line, with *AS* describing it as part of a "repertoire of misdemeanours", "far from an isolated incident", and *Marca* calling it "unacceptable" and "shameful". Typically, the competition committee stayed out of it. Pepe received no punishment, despite the moral crusade against him. He is, many said, not worthy of Real Madrid.

But the tide had turned – and some were saying the same about Mourinho.

Cynical and boring

Since Mourinho took over at the Santiago Bernabeu, Real have played against Barcelona in a way that is not commensurate with the club's history: dirty, cynical and boring are all adjectives that have been applied to his team. And fearful, too, as he left his more talented players out and tried simply to defend in the Cup first leg. Two days later, *Marca* published a story revealing a training ground conversation with Sergio Ramos.

The search was on for the mole. That became the obsession, more, even, than the real substance of the story: the discussion, while not especially strong, revealed important divisions within the squad – and highlighted the fault lines. Mourinho's relationship with some of his Spanish players was shown to be distrustful and resentful. The media smelt blood and Mourinho smelt a crusade. His next press conference was tense and aggressive. There was little doubt that he was ill at ease.

Flashpoint...Pepe steps on Messi's hand while, below, Gerard Pique holds on to his stricken team-mate

Mourinho may have played all his most talented players in the second leg, and Madrid were impressive, having Barcelona on the ropes for much of the game. Some said that he had been wrong all along and that the players, who wanted a more expansive style, had been right. But Madrid went out anyway. Amid all the euphoria the fact overlooked was that Barcelona had progressed, and Mourinho had played 10 games against Barca and still won just one of them.

After the game, Mourinho again complained about the referee. He even waited in the car park to confront him. Just when the image could have been good, it was bad again. Three days after that, Madrid went seven points clear in the league and are clear favourites to win the title. But the damage was done.

That morning, a leak from Mourinho's camp insisted that he was going to leave at the end of the season. Many in Madrid have grown tired of him. And he has grown tired of them.

Sid Lowe

storemas.com

"When Lionel Messi has scored 1,283 goals and won three World Cups, then we will talk. People ask me all the time when will there be a new Pele. I tell them: 'Never.' My parents shut down the factory"

Pele (far right), with Messi

UKRAINE

National team keeper faces drugs ban

Out...Rybka

Oleksandr Rybka, a strong candidate to be Ukraine's first-choice goalkeeper, will miss the Euro finals after failing a drugs test.

The Shakhtar Donetsk stopper was suspended for two years by UEFA after testing positive for a banned diuretic following a league game against Karpaty Lviv in November.

Shakhtar said they would appeal, amid reports that the player had taken a slimming drug.

ISRAEL

Palestinians cry foul after player switches to Israeli club

FIFA may be called in to mediate a dispute between two clubs in the Middle East after Palestinian side Jabal Mukkaber claimed Israeli rivals Hapoel Haifa had poached their midfielder Ali Khatib.

Jabal Mukkaber said that Khatib, a 22-year-old Arab-Israeli who also plays for Palestine's national side, was under contract to them until 2016.

But the player claims that he was a free agent and was able to sign for Hapoel Haifa following a trial because he was registered with the Israeli FA.

There are no formal ties between the Israeli and Palestinian football associations, and FIFA may have to step in to resolve the dispute.

HEROES & VILLAINS

PABLO INFANTE

The bank manager and part-time footballer's six goals helped third-division Mirandes reach the semi-finals of the Spanish Cup for the first time in their history. They beat La Liga's Espanyol in the quarter-finals and Racing Santander and Villarreal in earlier rounds.

Banker...Infante

FRANCESCO TOTTI

Two goals against Cesena took the Roma captain's league total to 211, breaking Gunnar Nordahl's 56-year-old record (for Milan between 1949 and 1956) for the most Serie A goals with a single club.

ERIC ABIDAL

During a local hospital visit to cancer sufferers, the Barcelona defender, himself recovering from liver cancer, removed his £20,000 Rolex watch from his wrist and gave it to 15-year-old Juan Garcia, suffering from a brain tumour, and refused any attempt to make him take it back.

Old routine...Henry

THIERRY HENRY

Back on loan from New York Red Bulls, it took Arsenal's record goalscorer just nine minutes to score on his return as a sub against Leeds United in the FA Cup.

LUCHEZAR YONOV

The banned Bulgarian referee used the name of fellow countryman and eligible official Raicho Raichev to take charge of a winter friendly between Werder Bremen and AZ Alkmaar in the Turkish resort of Belek.

VALERI BOJINOV

The Bulgarian striker shoved Sporting Lisbon's regular penalty taker, Matias Fernandez, out of his way and then missed the injury-time spot-kick in a 1-1 home draw with lower-tier side Moreirense in the Portuguese Cup. He was later sent on loan to Italy's Lecce.

Penalty...Bojinov

LEIGH GRIFFITHS

The Hibernian striker has been banned three times in two months for making gestures at supporters during matches in Scotland.

Gestures...Griffiths (right)

LUIS JIMENEZ

Al Ahli's former Lazio and Internazionale midfielder was sent off and faces a long ban after butting the referee in a UAE Pro-League game against Al Jazira.

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"It's like flirting with a girl. Perhaps she will resist you at first, but if you continue to ask her out it always ends well"

A spokesman for Shanghai Shenhua remains convinced the Chinese club can successfully woo Didier Drogba from Chelsea

PARAGUAY

Cabanas returns after gunman left him for dead

Nearly two years to the day after he was shot in the head in Mexico City, Paraguayan striker Salvador Cabanas was back on a football field with a realistic chance of resuming his career.

He played a few minutes of a pre-season friendly for 12 de Octubre of Itagua – the little city and club where he first turned professional over a decade ago. From Itagua, the stocky midfielder embarked on a journey that would transform him into a feared striker, passing through Chile to Mexico, twice finishing as top scorer in the Libertadores Cup and accumulating 10 goals in 45 games for Paraguay.

Although he rejoins 12 de Octubre with the club in the third division, Cabanas is glad to be playing professional football at any level. When he was shot on January 25, 2010, his life was in grave danger. Indeed, the bullet is still lodged in his skull. It is remarkable that he has been able to make any sort of comeback.

"He can do anything he wants," says Ernesto Martinez Duhart, the neurosurgeon who operated on him two years ago. "The bullet is no longer a problem." But not everyone agrees, and Mario Feltes, a Paraguayan specialist, argues: "Cabanas will never be what he used to be because after a computer is damaged it's not the same thing."

The player himself also seems to recognise that he has limitations, commenting: "It's been recommended to me that I don't head balls that are travelling very fast." But, that aside, he is optimistic, adding: "I'm at about 80 per cent and just need to acquire match fitness." He has even spoken of resuming his international career.

At the age of 31 that is unlikely, with a new Paraguayan generation now pushing for opportunities. But at least Cabanas has acquired some extra wisdom along the way. "Everything in my recuperation has been very difficult," he says. "But I've learned lots from it. What I went through was very serious, but now I think 'what on earth was I doing at that time of night in a disco?'" – a reference to his shooting in Mexico City.

The comeback has also been soured by a legal dispute with his former agent, Jose Maria Gonzalez. But on a deeper level it has nothing to do with money.

"He is very emotional about finally resuming his career," says his wife, Maria Lorgia, on the day he first took the field. "Especially because it's happening in the place that he was born as a footballer. [Before the game] he was so excited that he couldn't sleep."

Amid the cynicism that the modern game can generate, that declaration serves as a refreshing antidote.

Tim Vickery

Welcome back...Cabanas (left) meets his 12 de Octubre team-mates

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"Brazil won't be 100 per cent ready. Of the 12 stadiums, maybe 10 will be ready. As for work on public transport, none of the cities will be able to complete it fully"

Former World Cup winner and Brazil politician Romario voices his concerns over the 2014 World Cup

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 ANTONIO DI NATALE
Udinese v Chievo
Hits an unstoppable, swerving right-footed free-kick with the outside of his boot into the top corner.

2 ERIAN MEALLA
Nacional Potosi v The Strongest
An amazing back-heel volley from outside the area on the opening day of the Bolivian season.

3 DRIES MERTENS
PSV Eindhoven v Vitesse
A pacy run, a drop of the shoulder and a powerful shot into the top corner.

4 DANI ALVES
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Latches on to a ricochet following a Barca free-kick and sends a blistering shot high across goalkeeper Iker Casillas and into the far top corner.

5 IDIR OUALI
Le Mans v Guingamp
Shades of Marco Van Basten for Holland in 1988 as Ouali volleys into the far top corner past an outstretched Guingamp goalkeeper.

6 CRISTIAN VILLAGRA
Metalist Kharkiv v Dinamo Moscow
Sees the goalkeeper off his line and hits a looping free-kick from well inside his own half that goes in off the crossbar.

GOALS WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN
To see video footage of these goals and many more we've selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to: bit.ly/ypXBA0

WINNERS

ANDRIY VORONIN
The ex-Liverpool flop was voted Ukraine's player of the year after his superb form with Dynamo Moscow in Russia.

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
Voted Serie A player of the year for 2011 by his fellow pros.

LIVERPOOL
Their new six-year kit deal with American firm Warrior Sports is worth £25million per season – a contract only eclipsed by Barcelona's £26.3m deal with Nike.

SENEGAL
Third-favourites for the African Nations Cup, they made an early exit after losing all three of their group games.

CARLOS TEVEZ
The Argentinian's fallout with Manchester City is reported to have cost him £9.3million in fines, lost wages and missed bonuses.

MANCHESTER UNITED
The Premier League champions gave up on their talented but troubled teenager Ravel Morrison, who moved to West Ham United.

LOSERS

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"I very much support Arsenal, but to be honest Wenger needs to coach another team now and Arsenal needs another coach"

Rwanda state president and alleged Gunners fan Paul Kagame offers his views on the club via Twitter

■ OBITUARIES

Pierre SINIBALDI (1924-2011)

The death of Pierre Sinibaldi, one of the finest football brains ever to come out of Corsica, has been mourned not so much in his original home as in Brussels, where he was the iconic coach of Anderlecht in the late 1960s.

Sinibaldi was one of three footballing brothers who achieved the unique family feat of being members of Reims' French championship-winning side in 1949. Pierre played at centre- or inside-forward, Paul was a goalkeeper and Noel was outside-left.

Pierre was also once top league scorer in France and played twice for *Les Bleus*, making his debut in a 2-1 win over England in 1946. He went on to play for Nantes, Lyon and Perpignan – where he retired and began his coaching career.

Sinibaldi was managing the Luxembourg national team when he was signed up by Anderlecht to succeed the legendary and long-serving Englishman Bill Gormlie. And a remarkably talented generation of players at the club enabled Sinibaldi to put into practise his belief in patient possession football.

Like many much later coaches, he believed in what is now called a "high defensive line" and his Anderlecht won four league titles and one Belgian Cup, frustrating opponents with their perfect execution of the offside trap.

They also had the goal-laden blessing of the country's greatest-ever player – and Sinibaldi's all-time favourite – in Paul Van Himst.

Years later, and with some justification, Sinibaldi would say: "As a coach, I was ahead of my time. We were the model for Ajax's total football."

His most notable achievement was in knocking the mighty Real Madrid – Di Stefano, Puskas, et al – out of the European Cup in the autumn of 1962. Time and again in Europe, however, Anderlecht were outgunned by British clubs whose direct style was the perfect antithesis of the Sinibaldi "method".

Sinibaldi coached *Les Mauves* from 1960 to 1966, then Monaco, Anderlecht again – when they were Fairs Cup runners-up to Arsenal in 1970 – Las Palmas, Gijon and Sporting Toulon Var.

An admirer of the style and technical mastery of the great Hungary and Brazil sides of the 1950s, his proudest memory was the second half of an international against Holland in September, 1964, when the Belgium team was made up entirely of his Anderlecht players.

Keir Radnedge

League champions... Sinibaldi (back row, far left) with his 1968 Anderlecht side

Murdered...Ntuka

Jeffrey NTUKA (1985-2012)

The SuperSport United and former South Africa defender died after being stabbed in the chest during an argument in the township of Kroonstad. He spent time with Chelsea as a teenager but did not feature in the first team.

Lefter KUCUKANDONYADIS (1925-2012)

The former Turkey striker, who scored 423 goals in 615 appearances over two spells for Fenerbahce, died following a long illness.

Madrid boss...Miljanic

Miljan MILJANIC (1930-2012)

Won 10 trophies with Red Star Belgrade before leading Real Madrid to back-to-back Spanish titles. Took Yugoslavia to the 1974 and 1982 World Cups and was president of his country's FA.

Ladislav KUNA (1947-2012)

Kuna was born on April 3, 1947 and starred with Spartak Trnava under master-coach Anton Malatinsky. He scored 86 goals in 424 games between 1964 and 1980, then joined the Austrian club Admira Vienna.

He played for Czechoslovakia at the 1970 World Cup and scored a total of nine goals in 47 internationals between 1966 and 1974 for his country. He was Czechoslovakia's player of the year in 1969 and later coached Trnava, Wiener Neustadt and Dunajska Streda.

He had been chairman of Trnava since 2006.

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"I write like a two-year-old and can't even fill in a teamsheet"

Tottenham's Harry Redknapp admits he has trouble with reading and writing

SERBIA

Grant takes Partizan job

Former Chelsea manager Avram Grant faced a difficult start to his new job as coach of Serbian champions Partizan Belgrade, with fans unhappy at his appointment and the club forced to cancel a training camp in Dubai because the UAE authorities would not let Israeli citizen Grant into the country.

Grant was appointed after Partizan president Dragan Duric sacked head coach Aleksandar Stanojevic and sports director Mladen Krstajic after an autumn of infighting at the club.

Stanojevic was dismissed despite leading Partizan to a domestic double last season and in spite of finishing the autumn campaign 10 points ahead of city rivals Red Star. But the coach, who had been unhappy at the sale of Stefan Savic to Manchester City last summer, also oversaw a disastrous exit from the Europa League at the hands of Shamrock Rovers.

Grant must now deal with the expectations of fans unhappy at the departures. He also had to deal with a more practical problem when he was not allowed to attend a training camp in Dubai. Partizan, who had to write off the flight tickets and hotel accommodation, went to Israel instead.

Vladimir Novak

Tough start...Grant (right) with assistant Vanja Radinovic

David CONN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

After the theory, UEFA faces the practical reality of enforcing FFP

At their headquarters by the banks of Lake Geneva, UEFA recently spent a day outlining the progress of their Financial Fairplay (FFP) rules, arguably football's most significant act of governance in living memory. The rules require clubs in UEFA competition to have limited their losses in the two previous financial years to a maximum of €45million, if that is covered by an owner. If there is no rich man to bankroll a club, the total losses in the 2012 and 2013 financial years can amount to only €5m.

That represents a genuine culture change; a final "wake-up call," as UEFAs general-secretary, Gianni Infantino, put it, from the free-spending years. UEFA's report, a collation of the 2009-10 accounts of Europe's top-division clubs, showed that across a game still phenomenally popular and commercially booming, the clubs cannot help but spend too much on players' wages, and recorded a total net loss of €1.6billion.

A multi-coloured blizzard of graphs went on to illustrate the depth of these losses. Income across the top leagues has continued to grow to a new record every year – in 2010 the figure was €12.8bn, up by €800m from 2009. Yet total costs, of which players' wages are still by far the biggest element, increased, by over €1bn to €14.4bn. The top-division clubs' losses deepened by almost €1bn in just two years since 2008, when the loss was €649m, to 2010's glaring €1.6bn.

UEFA presented all this to demonstrate the need for a change; to show, Infantino said, that across European football there was "a potential crisis, like the crisis in the European economy generally".

It was striking to see how assertively UEFA outlined this case, and its stated determination to enforce them firmly, with a range of sanctions, up to the most serious one of banning a club from taking part in the Champions or Europa Leagues.

Alasdair Bell, UEFA's head of legal affairs, said that, having invested so much of the organisation's time and reputation on introducing these rules, they will have "no credibility" if they do not enforce them with sanctions substantial enough to make clubs comply. There has been talk that clubs hit with sanctions will challenge the rules legally, arguing it is a restraint of trade for UEFA to prevent them spending and investing money as they wish.

Bell said he had spent a great deal of time trying to ensure that the rules are framed in a way which gives them the best chance of being upheld as legal. Principally UEFA believes that because the objectives of the rules are positive and constructive – that they "encourage responsible spending for the long-term benefit of football, protect clubs' creditors, improve the economic and financial capability of clubs, increasing their transparency and credibility" – the EU will be inclined to uphold them as reasonable.

From an English perspective, where the combination of Premier League financial might and general anti-European sentiment has depicted the rules as a Michel Platini-inspired attack, it was enlightening to hear Infantino outline the positive vision behind them. The rules allow clubs, and their owners, to spend unlimited amounts on stadiums, youth development and infrastructure.

> FFP will have no credibility if UEFA do not enforce them with substantial sanctions

The idea is to move towards more stable planning, rather than lurch between transfer windows, desperately seeking new rich buyers to scoop up losses. As for the Premier League, in which competition has arrived to challenge Manchester United's dominance only because of the sums sunk in by the oil-rich owners of Chelsea and Manchester City, UEFA argues that is not a sustainable way to make a league competitive.

How UEFA can do that – rather than find that their rules cement the dominance of the clubs making the most money – may be the greatest challenge. WS

"Messi probably would have been as good if he'd gone to Barcelona at 22. As a father, it would bother me to see my son of 13 leave for the other side of the world"

UEFA chief Michel Platini once again hits out at adolescent players leaving their country of origin

WINTER TRANSFER-WINDOW MOVES

New arrival... Thiago Motta

Motta heads PSG signings

After proposed moves for Carlos Tevez, Kaka and David Beckham fell through, Paris Saint-Germain signed Brazilian-born Italy international midfielder **THIAGO MOTTA** from Internazionale, and Brazilians **ALEX** (from Chelsea) and **MAXWELL** (Barcelona).

■ Turkish striker **MEVLUT ERDING** left PSG for Rennes in a £6m deal, while Lille signed **NOLAN ROUX** from Brest for £6.5m as a replacement for the Fenerbahce-bound **MOUSSA SOW**.

■ Milan signed Argentinian striker **MAXI LOPEZ** from Catania on loan with the option for a permanent deal in the summer. Milan also signed Ghana winger **SULLEY MUNTARI** on loan from city rivals Internazionale.

On loan... Boriello (left)

■ Juventus were one of the busiest of the leading Italian clubs, signing striker **MARCO BORIELLO** (loan from Roma), Uruguayan defender **MARTIN CACERES** (loan from Sevilla) and midfielder **SIMONE PADOIN** (£4m, Atalanta). Out-of-favour striker **AMAURI** joined Fiorentina

■ To replace Thiago Motta, Internazionale signed Porto's Colombian midfielder **FREDY GUARIN** and Sampdoria's Italy international **ANGELO PALOMBO**. Young Brazilian defender **JUAN** also joined, from Internacional for a fee of £3m.

■ Italy striker **ALBERTO GILARDINO** left Fiorentina for Genoa in a £6.5m deal, while national team goalkeeper **EMILIANO VIVIANO** left Inter for Palermo.

■ Lazio signed Uruguayan forward **EMILIANO ALFARO** from Liverpool of Montevideo, while Swiss midfielder **GELSON** went to Udinese on loan from Saint-Etienne.

■ **JOSE ANTONIO REYES** returned to first club Sevilla, from Atletico Madrid for £3m. Sevilla also signed Senegalese striker **BABA DIAWARA** from Maritimo for £2.5m.

■ Cameroon keeper **CARLOS KAMENI** joined Malaga from Espanyol, who signed Brazilian youngster **COUTINHO** on loan from Internazionale.

■ Senegalese striker **MAME BIRAM DIOUF** joined Hanover from Manchester United, while Bayer Leverkusen made keeper Bernd Leno's loan from Stuttgart permanent for £6m.

■ Wolfsburg signed **RICARDO RODRIGUEZ** (Zurich), Portuguese midfielder **VIERINHA** (PAOK) and Franco-Ivorian wing-back **GIOVANNI SIO** (Sion).

■ Bosnian striker **VEDAD IBISEVIC** joined Stuttgart from Hoffenheim for £3.7m.

Bundesliga switch ...Ibisevic

■ Chelsea signed **GARY CAHILL** from Bolton Wanderers and **KEVIN DE BRUYNE** from Genk, both for fees of around £8m. De Bruyne was loaned back to Belgium for the remainder of the season.

■ Newcastle United signed Senegalese striker **PAPISS CISSE** for £10m from German club Freiburg.

London calling ...Cisse

■ **QPR** were the busiest of the Premier League clubs, signing striker **BOBBY ZAMORA** from Fulham for a fee of £4m, **DJIBRIL CISSE** from Lazio for a fee of £4.5m, Malian midfielder **SAMBA DIAKITE** on loan from Nancy, defender **NEDUM ONUOHA** from Manchester City for a fee of £4.7m and Nigerian defender **TAYE TAIWO** on loan from Milan.

■ Everton signed Croatian striker **NIKICA JELAVIC** from Rangers for £5m and gave striker **LOUIS SAHA** a free transfer to Tottenham Hotspur, who in turn allowed South African midfielder **STEVEN PIENAAR** to return to Everton on loan.

■ Porto signed Austrian striker **MARC JANKO** from Twente for £2.5m and also took back former player **LUCHO GONZALEZ** on a free transfer from Marseille.

■ Russia striker **ROMAN PAVLYUCHENKO** left Tottenham and signed a three-and-a-half year deal with Lokomotiv Moscow.

■ Brazilians **VAGNER LOVE** and **JADSON** both returned home from eastern Europe, Wagner Love joining Flamengo from CSKA Moscow and Jadson leaving Shakhtar Donetsk for Sao Paulo.

JANUARY TRANSFERS

For all the transfer window signings in Europe's big leagues, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see all the moves by logging onto bit.ly/wWDmJg

"I'm puzzled as to Leonardo's job. Is he administrator, coach, agent or oil salesman?"

Diego Maradona has a sly dig at Paris Saint-Germain's technical director

TURKEY

Federation's top trio quit as match-fixing crisis deepens

Resigned...Aydinlar

The crisis in Turkish football over an ongoing match-fixing investigation deepened with the resignation of the chairman of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), Mehmet Ali Aydinlar, along with his two deputies, Goksel Gumusdag and Lutfi Arıbogan

The resignations followed a rejection by clubs of proposals designed to spare them from possible relegation over the match-fixing scandal in which several of the top teams, including champions Fenerbahce, are implicated.

Aydinlar, who has called the scandal the most serious crisis Turkish football has ever faced, was under pressure from UEFA to act quickly and take disciplinary action against those allegedly involved in the match fixing.

In December, a court issued proceedings against 93 officials and players, most notably Aziz Yildirim, chairman of Fenerbahce, who were prevented from entering this season's Champions League by the federation and threatened with relegation.

Under the proposals rejected by the clubs, those involved in match fixing would no longer face relegation, but would instead have faced a minimum 12-point deduction.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Has Wenger been in England too long for his own good?

So the "In Arsene We Trust" banners are back. Who puts those things up anyway? I suppose my vision of Arsene Wenger and Ivan Gazidis clambering about the Emirates Stadium in the dead of night is probably incorrect. More's the pity...

Well, do we? Still trust Arsene, I mean. I do, just about. But my faith took an almost fatal knock recently towards the end of the Arsenal-Manchester United game. With United leading 2-1, and the Gunners pressing desperately for the equaliser, I noticed an unfamiliar body charging about in the Arsenal attack; a large, unfamiliar body who I quickly identified as defender Per Mertesacker.

I assumed he'd sallied forward for a set-piece. Maybe he had – but he stayed forward. For the final eight minutes, Mertesacker was playing up front.

Maybe he was concussed or something and didn't realise where he was? But there were no outbursts from the sideline, no images of Wenger frantically waving at him to get back to where he belonged.

Then the appalling truth sank in. Wenger, the arch priest of intelligent football, was using the oldest and the crudest tactical ploy in British coaching: when things are desperate, when all else has failed, send the big guy up front.

> Wenger was using the crudest tactical ploy in British coaching: if all else has failed, send the big guy up front

In years gone by that meant, always, the lone centre-back, who was invariably the tallest and the clumsiest player in the team. At crisis time he was sent lumbering forward not just for corner kicks or free-kicks, but to stay and play up there as a sort of rampaging havoc creator. This entailed plying him with long balls, looking for knock downs and, at the very least, causing chaos and panic in the enemy penalty area.

How unWengeresque can you get? I mean, even British coaches don't go in for that sort of thing much these days.

When I was a kid, back in the no-subs days when tactics was still a dirty word – "what you do when you haven't got the players" – the smart-asses among us could quickly spot the only three tactical moves then to be seen in English football. There was the tight marker who followed his opponent to the bathroom; there was the decision by the coach to have his two full-backs switch flanks; and there was the moment when the big guy went up front and started crashing into people.

I've given the matter some thought over the years, and I've more or less convinced myself that moving the big guy up front is something only the Brits do. I'm pretty sure I've never seen Brazilian or Argentinian or Italian or French or Spanish or German or Dutch teams do it. Maybe I've missed an incident or two, but it doesn't seem to be an activity that the rest of the world has found appealing or useful.

Of course, it needs saying that this sacrilegious play can work. I recall a game some 11 years ago in which a team losing 2-1 to Shakhtar Donetsk had sent a defender up – and, while I was still ridiculing the move, he scored in the 85th and 90th minutes. Centre-back Martin Keown's two goals won the game for Arsenal... whose manager was, of course, Wenger.

But you can see how it has become so very difficult to maintain the Wenger faith. Arsene's use of Mertesacker as an *attaquant provocateur*, or more accurately an *attaquant gauche* (and, no, I do not mean left-sided) cannot be forgotten. It gave us the worst eight minutes of Wenger-ball that has ever been seen. There was chaotic play at the United end of the pitch, but most of it came from Arsenal players who were unable to understand what Mertesacker was supposed to be doing.

Rightly and properly, Arsenal lost the game anyway. A horrendous betrayal of the beautiful game, it's left me wondering: is Wenger civilising English football, or is the English game coarsening Wenger? WS

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"Before Mr Glazer bought Manchester United, he didn't know there was air in the ball. That is not something that I accept. His target is making money"

Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness isn't a big fan of the Premier League side's American owner

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Parma challenge ...Donadoni

EUROPE

Former Italy coach **ROBERTO DONADONI** replaced Franco Colomba as coach of Parma following their 5-0 loss away to Internazionale in Serie A.

Paris Saint-Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti named **PAUL CLEMENT** as his assistant, alongside Claude Makelele, at the French club. Clement previously worked with Ancelotti at Chelsea and resigned his position with Blackburn Rovers to take the PSG job.

Granada appointed ex-Atletico Madrid coach **ABEL RESINO** to replace Fabri Gonzalez, who was sacked after the La Liga side's 3-0 loss to Espanyol, their third successive defeat.

Former Wales boss **MARK HUGHES**, who left Fulham in June, was named manager of Queens Park Rangers, who dismissed Neil Warnock after a run of poor results.

Reunion...Clement (right)

Borussia Dortmund extended the contract of coach **JURGEN KLOPP** until 2016 after he led the club to the Bundesliga title last season and has taken them to a share of top spot with Bayern Munich and Schalke this term.

Ex-Wales defender **CHRIS COLEMAN** is his country's new manager, succeeding Gary Speed, who died in November. Previously in charge of Fulham, Real Sociedad and Coventry City, Coleman left Greek second-tier club Larissa.

Romania-born **CSABA LASZLO**, who was in charge of Uganda from 2006 to 2008, was appointed coach of Lithuania's national side.

ION CARAS, who was Moldova's first national coach following the fall of the Soviet Union, has been reappointed, taking over from Romania's Gavril Balint who was sacked after the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign.

Hapoel Tel Aviv replaced coach Dror Kashtan with **NITZAN SHIRAZI** after a poor run of results in the Israeli Premier League.

CONCACAF

Former England captain **DAVID BECKHAM** signed a new two-year contract with MLS club Los Angeles Galaxy.

Guadalajara replaced Fernando Quirarte with former Real Zaragoza coach **IGNACIO AMBRIZ** after three straight defeats meant a worst-ever start to a season for the Mexican club.

Staying in California ...Beckham

AFRICA

Swiss coach **MICHEL DECASTEL** returned to Esperance to take charge of the African champions almost a decade after leaving the Tunisian club. He was appointed two days after being fired by Morocco's Wydad Casablanca – the team Esperance beat to win the African Champions League in November 2011.

Back at Esperance ...Decastel

Ex-France captain and Comoros coach **MANUEL AMOROS** replaced Edme Codjo in charge of Benin. The 50-year-old, who won the UEFA Champions League with Marseille in 1993, will be assisted by fellow Frenchman **NICOLAS PHILIBERT**.

PETER BONU JOHNSON, who coached Gambia for one game in 2006, has been given the job again, replacing Paul Put of Belgium. Johnson will begin with an African Nations Cup qualifier in Algeria at the end of February. He previously led club side Ports Authority to the Gambian title in 2010.

ASIA

Juventus' ex-Italy striker **LUCA TONI** joined Al Nasr, the UAE Pro-League club who are coached by former Internazionale and *Azzurri* goalkeeper Walter Zenga.

Sao Paulo departure...Rivaldo

God has called me to Angola says Rivaldo

Former Brazil and Barcelona midfielder **RIVALDO** joined Kabuscorp on a one-year contract after leaving Sao Paulo in his homeland. The Angolan side became the 39-year-old's 13th club across four continents.

Rivaldo revealed he made the move for religious reasons. "God has a plan for me in Angola," he claims. "Five months ago I invested in a piece of land here, without imagining that I would ever play here. My spiritual guide Victor [Adewole] and I are opening a church here. My time belongs to God now...my life in Angola is about more than soccer. God is here."

"Coming to Rome was the best decision I could have possibly made. Beforehand I had never seen a postman kneel on my doorstep and kiss my feet – but it's happened to me here"

Lazio's much-appreciated German striker Miroslav Klose

Appointments, sackings and loans

Ex Ajax and Panathinaikos coach **HENK TEN CATE** took charge of Shandong Luneng ahead of the start of the new Chinese Super League season.

Former Aston Villa and England Under-21 defender **JLLOYD SAMUEL**, who was released by Bolton Wanderers last summer, joined Iran's Esteghlal.

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal replaced German boss Thomas Doll with **IVAN HASEK**. The Czech coach had been dismissed by UAE club side Al Ahli in November.

In at Al Hilal...Hasek

JORGINHO, who coached Figueirense to seventh place in the Brazilian championship last year and was an assistant to national coach Dunga at the 2010 World Cup, took charge of J.League side Kashima Antlers.

Brazil striker **DIEGO TARDELLI**, who has won five caps for his country, joined Al Gharafa of Qatar from Russian Premier League club Anzhi Makhachkala. Anzhi also loaned Togo striker Arafat Djako to Al Arabi of Qatar.

AJI SANTOSO was appointed caretaker coach of Indonesia, while the country's FA seek to establish a board to manage the national team.

EUROPE

Sporting Gijon parted company with coach **MANUEL PRECIADO** after winning just one of their last six La Liga games. He had been in charge of Sporting since 2006 and led the club to promotion to Spain's top flight in 2008.

VLADIMIR WEISS, who took Slovakia to the last 16 of the World Cup in 2010, had his contract as coach terminated by mutual consent.

Former Brazil and Real Madrid left-back **ROBERTO CARLOS** has announced he will retire at the end of the year. The 38-year-old, who is currently with Anzhi Makhachkala, says he will focus solely on a coaching role with the Russian club from 2013 onwards.

Ex-Greece captain **THEODOROS ZAGORAKIS**, who lifted the Euro 2004 trophy, resigned as president of PAOK after fans broke seats and invaded the pitch following a 2-1 home defeat by Atromitos Athens in protest against the sale of Portuguese midfielder Vieirinha to German club Wolfsburg.

Lyngby's **KIM AALBECH** was banned for eight games after betting on his team to lose a Danish Super League game away to Copenhagen in November. The 28-year-old midfielder appeared as a 71st-minute substitute as his side lost 3-0.

Barcelona terminated the contract of Belarus midfielder **ALEXANDER HLEB**. The 30-year-old joined Barca from Arsenal in 2008 and had spells on loan at Stuttgart, Birmingham City and Wolfsburg.

Winding down... Roberto Carlos

CONCACAF

Coach **LUIS SALGADO** left Estudiantes Tecos after they were beaten in their opening two games of the Mexican clausura campaign.

ASIA

Ghanaian Premier League debutants Wassaman sacked coach **HERBERT ADDO** halfway into the season with the club bottom of the league.

ASIA

Thailand striker **SOMPONG SOLEB** was banned for life from the national team by coach Winfried Schaefer after being found guilty of a hit-and-run and drink-driving.

Dutchman **WIM RIJSBERGEN** was sacked as Indonesia coach but retained by the FA as technical director.

MOHAMMED KWID, who led Al Wehdat to last year's AFC Cup semi-finals, stepped down as coach of the Jordanian side after a 1-1 draw with That Ras.

End...Kwid

Ahn calls it a day

AHN JUNG-HWAN, one of the heroes of South Korea's run to the semi-finals of the 2002 World Cup, has announced his retirement as a player. The 36-year-old striker played for Chinese side Dalian Shide last season.

Ahn had his contract cancelled by Italian club Perugia after he scored South Korea's winning goal in extra-time against Italy at the 2002 World Cup.

"No longer as a football player but as a head of a family and as a fan of football, I will cheer on the Korean football. I want to rest," said a tearful Ahn after he announced his decision.

Memories...Ahn takes on Italy at the 2002 World Cup

Stekkings

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

All Change...Mourinho (right) could be the best bet to transform Arsenal after recent lean years under Wenger

Wenger-Mourinho swap would benefit Arsenal more than Real

Jose Mourinho for Arsenal? Arsene Wenger for Real Madrid? It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, though, on the face of it, Arsenal would arguably get the better bargain. For though the Gunners did come off the canvas to wipe out a two-goal disadvantage to defeat Aston Villa in the FA Cup at the Emirates, and though Wenger has had shocking luck with injuries – the decimation of their recognised full-backs and the persistence of the irreplaceable playmaker Jack Wilshere's ankle troubles has been a colossal blow to club and country – he has made far too many costly mistakes.

Wenger was surely dicing with death both at Swansea City and at home to Manchester United with the choices that he made. In Swansea, both full-backs struggled. Johan Djourou was all too obviously a centre-back sadly out of position; on the left flank the inexperienced teenager Ignasi Miquel, pressed into service on his wrong foot, was tormented by the Swansea right-winger Nathan Dyer.

In the subsequent game against United at the Emirates, Wenger, against all logic, persisted with Djourou at right-back, where he was fearfully exposed by Nani, who played a focal part in United's opening goal. All this was compounded by Wenger's inexplicable decision to take off the prodigiously exciting young Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain immediately after he had set up Arsenal's goal for Robin Van Persie. Wenger said afterwards that Oxlade-Chamberlain had incurred an injury, but that hardly affected his prowess in setting up the goal.

To add insult, you might say, to supposed injury, Wenger brought on Andrei Arshavin in place of Oxlade-Chamberlain. The Russian soon proceeded ineptly to propitiate Danny Welbeck's winning goal.

Defensive inadequacies and a first-half lack of finishing power, despite some pretty patterns, looked all too likely to bring Cup defeat against Villa, but a much-improved performance by the team at large, and a suddenly inspired Theo Walcott in particular, brought two penalties and a breathless ultimate victory.

These, one would have thought, are hardly the criteria to make Wenger, whatever his past achievements, an ideal appointment for Real Madrid. By contrast Mourinho, who has reportedly fallen out with the Spanish contingent in his Real team, remains a manager, like him or hate him, with a formidable track record, especially in the European Cup. He is certainly vain, abrasive, contentious, and at Real, especially against Barcelona, he has countenanced some brutally aggressive play – as seen in the way his Portuguese defender Pepe stamped on the peerless Lionel Messi.

But Mourinho, who says he wants to return to England, would surely give the Gunners new hope and efficacity.

Andre Villas-Boas hardly seems secure at Chelsea, where he has now cast his young reserves out of first-team facilities and petulantly ruled Nicolas Anelka and Alex, both now departed, out of the team's Christmas party. But

> Mourinho remains, like him or hate him, a manager with a formidable track record, especially in the European Cup

arenascon

it doesn't seem very likely Mourinho would forgive and forget the way, so to speak, that owner Roman Abramovich threw his toys out of the directors box at Villa Park that day and not long afterwards, ejected him.

Yes, Manchester City, those spendthrift plutocrats, could easily afford him – and they might well pursue him now that manager Roberto Mancini has failed to stay the course in Europe or the League Cup.

Platini is not the answer for FIFA

Michel Platini, such a superb player and such a disappointing administrator, insists that he has nothing against English football, yet he says he admires only the fans. Has he heard them in bigoted chorus?

He deserves high marks for his plans to limit the insanely excessive spending of the likes of Manchester City. But how to comprehend, let alone forgive, his backing for Qatar as World Cup hosts, absurdly compounded by his suggestion that their wholly unmerited World Cup should be played in winter, thereby throwing the European clubs he is supposed to protect into chaos?

Not to mention the wretched Europa League competition he has dismally devised, which has clubs playing from July, subject to immense, exhausting journeys, and swollen by obscure, remote teams.

If Platini does succeed Sepp Blatter, as the president of FIFA, it would doubtless be an improvement. But hardly a solution.

West Ham right to ditch Olympic option

It now looks increasingly as if West Ham United will not relocate to the Olympic Stadium, which seems all too likely, in the image of Athens and Sydney, to become one more white elephant. Offered now only a tenancy, rather than ownership, West Ham, however belatedly, have found all sorts of cogent reasons to stay at Upton Park, which would delight their highly sceptical fans.

The existence of the athletics track, although it would be covered up, would still put the spectators too far from the pitch. The invasion of rock concerts early in the summer would do dreadful damage to that pitch, which would not have enough time to be renovated.

To which one might add that the stadium's capacity, even though reduced, to 60,000 might have been suitable for Tottenham Hotspur, but would be far too large for the Hammers.

No place like home... West Ham's Upton Park, with the Olympic Stadium in the background

> How Bellamy could have done with the endless patience Mancini seems ready to show the incorrigible Balotelli

Bellamy and Pennant enjoy their revival

A tale of two wingers, both with Liverpool connections, one of whom is back at Anfield after several years away, the other there no longer. I speak of Craig Bellamy and Jermaine Pennant, both players I have long admired.

Bellamy recently had the highly satisfying experience of confirming that old Italian "immutable law of the ex", devastating the defence of a Manchester City club which had rejected him. His excellence enabled Liverpool to draw 2-2 at home in the second leg of the League Cup semi-final and thus reach the Wembley Final on aggregate.

The other winger is, like Bellamy, a much-travelled footballer. A few days after Bellamy's display against Liverpool, one saw Pennant appear as a second-half substitute for Stoke City, promptly extend the Derby County keeper with a searing 30-yard free-kick and then show his abundance of elusive skills, ultimately bringing his team's second, late goal in an FA Cup tie with a searching right-wing corner. Stoke manager Tony Pulis brought him back from an unproductive spell in Spain and has been deservedly rewarded.

Had Bellamy only been fit to play for his beloved Wales against England last season it is quite feasible that Wales would have won, rather than throw away that late, point-blank chance to equalise. After his coruscating show against Manchester City, at least their manager Roberto Mancini had the grace to praise him, but there is little doubt that when Bellamy was at City he handled him clumsily and insensitively. Not least because of a persistent knee injury which necessitated a specially designed training programme.

Disapproving of it, Mancini forced Bellamy to train like the rest when City were on tour in the USA, causing him much pain and discomfort. How Bellamy could have done with the endless patience Mancini seems ready to show the incorrigible Mario Balotelli. WS

Back to haunt his old club ...Bellamy

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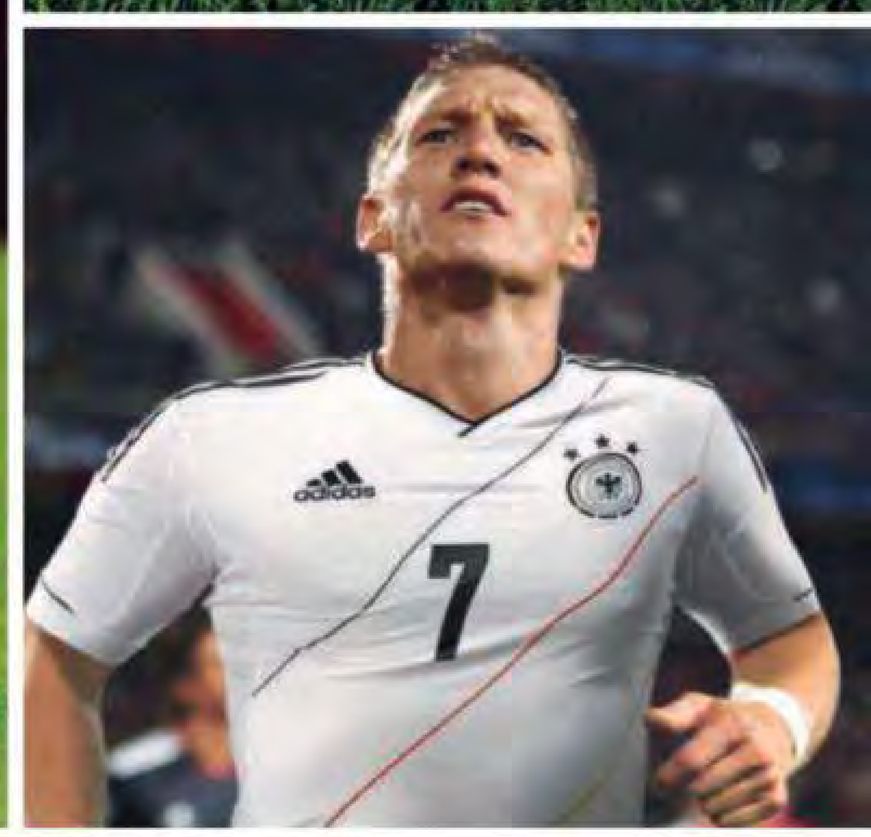

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OVER

In March, the International Football Association Board (IFAB) will discuss advanced plans to introduce goal-line cameras, which could be in place by the 2014 World Cup. It could be the worst mistake the football authorities have ever made, says Patrick Barclay

Over and out... Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is clearly beaten, but the goal was not given and England were on their way home from the 2010 World Cup

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IFAB: THE COMMITTEE THAT RULES THE GAME

A decision on the development of goal-line technology will be taken by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) at its 126th annual meeting, which is being held at the Pennyhill Park Hotel in Bagshot, Surrey, on March 3.

IFAB's role as the game's rule-making body dates back to 1886, when it was formed by the four Home Nation football associations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. FIFA joined in 1913, initially with two votes, and in 1958 the board structure was changed to give FIFA four votes, with one vote each to the four Home Nations. It has remained the same ever since.

Each of the Home Nations can take up to four representatives into the meeting but each delegation has one vote. Any proposal needs six of the eight votes to be carried.

Only IFAB members can propose changes to the laws of the game. The March agenda for the meeting includes a proposal from the Football Association that tape applied to socks to keep them up must be of the same colour as the socks.

IFAB: THE MEMBERS

ENGLAND (one vote)
The Football Association will be represented by chief executive Nic Coward and chairman David Bernstein.

NORTHERN IRELAND (one vote)
The Irish Football Association will be represented by Jim Shaw, IFA president, and chief executive Patrick Nelson.

SCOTLAND (one vote)
The SFA delegation will be led by Stuart Regan, chief executive.

WALES (one vote)
The FAW will be represented by chief executive Jonathan Ford.

FIFA (four votes)
FIFA president Sepp Blatter and vice-president (and UEFA president) Micheal Platini will have one vote each. The two other voters are as yet unknown.

When organised football began and spectators were first drawn to the game, decisions were taken by a referee with two assistants known, from 1891 onwards, as linesmen. There was no television and so the match officials and spectators had equality of perception through the naked eye. Except that the match officials were both closer to the action and better trained than most of the spectators, which meant that their judgment was respected – maybe not always in the heat of the moment, but certainly upon mature reflection.

Then came television. It was always bound to upset the balance between those who made the decisions and those who watched. Not immediately, because coverage tended to be a lot less intense than it is today, and such technological devices as the slow-motion replay were not available to directors at first. But over the past 20 years the difference has become increasingly stark.

Referees are shown to have good judgment in many cases, it is true, but their most unfortunate errors are shown over and over again, heightening a sense of injustice that has become rampant. Not surprisingly – because the viewers, with their retrospective privilege, have a better and longer view of incidents than the referee – the old respect is lost and the official, no matter how much harder and more relevantly he trains than his precursors did, cannot win it back.

Impending tragedy

The time has come to restore the original balance. Even Sepp Blatter, who would be the game's arch-conservative if it were not for Michel Platini, his most likely successor as FIFA president in 2015, recognises the need to do something (see *Face to Face*, page 62). The impending tragedy is that Blatter has chosen to make a dangerous concession in the licensing of trials with goal-line technology, which, if one of the eight systems competing for favour is chosen in the coming months, could be operative next season, at least in the highly supportive Premier League.

Dangerous? Goal-line technology? How can the accusation be made against football's equivalent of motherhood and apple pie? Even those who are not wildly enthusiastic about it concede that it can do no harm as long as it can be shown to work accurately, which is the purpose of the FIFA trials. But I have long feared that, if introduced alone, goal-line technology could be the most expensive, pointless and profoundly damaging mistake the game has made since its invention.

Only if video assistance for referees, which Blatter and Platini oppose fundamentally, is brought in at the same time can goal-line technology improve the game's mood. And, if you have video assistance you don't need goal-line technology in the first place. It is as simple as that. A cheap television set can do pretty well everything goal-line technology does. And a great deal more. And for a fraction of the cost. And yet the IFAB won't even be discussing it when they meet.

Penalty...referee Webb changes his mind at the 2009 Confederations Cup

The recent history of how we arrived at this perilous stage features not one but two events in the unprepossessing South African city of Bloemfontein. With Blatter, of course, heavily involved.

On June 15, 2009, a Confederations Cup match between Brazil and Egypt stood at 3-3 in the 90th minute when a Brazil attempt at goal was thwarted by Ahmed Elmohamady. The English referee, Howard Webb, awarded a corner kick. But while Elmohamady, who had collapsed clutching his head, was receiving treatment, the decision was changed to a penalty kick for use of the hands. Kaka scored to give Brazil victory after Elmohamady had been sent off.

The Egyptians protested that the decisions had been illicitly revised on the basis of television pictures seen by the fourth official, Mike Mullarkey. FIFA issued a statement insisting that

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Mullarkey had used only his eyes to discern Elmohamady's offence – or offences – before coming to Webb's assistance. And a couple of days later Blatter, aware of suspicion that video evidence had been transmitted to the referee of the 2006 World Cup Final before Zinedine Zidane was dismissed for a butt, announced that there would henceforth be no television for fourth officials, adding: "So now no one can say there is influence in decisions on the basis of video."

> If you have video assistance, you don't need goal-line technology in the first place. It is as simple as that

Simple virtue

If only he had taken the diametrically opposite route. If only Blatter had not so impetuously banned the monitors but recognised their simple virtue.

Which brings us to the latter occurrence in Bloemfontein. On June 27, 2010, England were trailing Germany 2-1 with 38 minutes of a World Cup second-round match gone when a shot from Frank Lampard struck the underside of Manuel Neuer's crossbar, bounced about a foot over the line and came back into play. A goal was not, however, given by either the Uruguayan referee, Jorge Larrionda, or the nearer assistant, because neither had seen the ball cross the line. It was an honest mistake but an outrageous injustice and Blatter, after expressing his regret to the English FA, promised to put goal-line technology on the agenda.

If only he had thought more deeply. If only he had recognised that to address one form of injustice – although goal-line errors cause great and understandable indignation, they are extremely rare – is to insult all others.

We had only hours to wait for evidence of that. Later on that same day, in Johannesburg, Lionel Messi flipped the ball through an advancing Mexico defence to Carlos Tevez, who scored from a position that near-instant replays showed to have been offside. The goal was nevertheless allowed, giving Argentina the lead, and they proceeded to knock Mexico out. Indeed they played Germany in the next round.

If fourth officials had been allowed video monitors as well as communication with the referees that day, both incorrect decisions would have been rectified and football would have avoided the indignity it suffered worldwide over Lampard's denial – especially because even people with a limited knowledge of football could see how wrong it was. If, on the other hand, there had been goal-line technology alone – as is now in danger

TESTING, TESTING... EIGHT COMPANIES ARE VYING FOR FIFA BUSINESS

Last year, FIFA began experiments with goal-line technology (GLT) and companies were invited to register an interest in taking part in trials. Eight companies were involved in "phase one" tests between September and December last year.

March's International Football Association Board (IFAB) meeting will decide on "phase two" tests and a timetable for the introduction of GLT, before a definitive decision on GLT – as well as on additional referees and goal-line officials – is taken at a special IFAB meeting immediately after the European Championships on July 2.

While phase one focused on the accuracy of the respective technology, phase two, which will be staged between March and June this year, will focus the fitness of technology in matchday scenarios, including changing weather conditions and different pitch surfaces.

Companies hoping to win the lucrative FIFA contract include Hawk-Eye, the British system that is currently used in cricket and tennis, and Cairos, the German company that has joined forces with Adidas in order to develop a "chipped" ball. An earlier Cairos system was used at the 2005 Under-17 World Cup in Peru but was deemed to be unsatisfactory.

Try again...Cairos hope that their the new "chipped" ball technology (right) is more successful than the system used at the Under-17 World Cup in 2005 (left)

That much...David Beckham knows what he saw in Bloemfontein

A clear view...cameras already monitor every aspect of the game

of happening – England would have been given justice but Mexico not. Mexico's grievance would have been all the deeper and more warranted.

This will be the effect of goal-line technology as Blatter sees it. It will help only a tiny minority of officials and increase rather than reduce the frustration felt by watchers – not to mention players and managers – and injured parties will decry the discrimination between one form of injustice and another. With a precedent set, the pressure will grow. There will be demands for "offside technology", then "edge of the penalty area technology", and such will be the frequency of grievances that FIFA will find them hard to resist. We shall end up talking more about technology than football.

So this is not a small step but a colossal blunder: the creation of a monster whose hunger for exactitude can never be satisfied. And, while respect is due to Blatter for his conservatism in the sense that he seems to have vague but sincere notions of protecting the game, his myopia is hard to credit.

When he talks of "the human element", he appears unaware that the introduction of video review would strengthen it. The monitors, far from being revolutionary, would be the conservative solution in that they would take us back to the original days of the professional game when everyone had the same view. Humans would watch. Human referees would make the decision and humans would once again assess them on an equal basis.

Controversial...England's third goal in the 1966 World Cup Final

Would goal-line technology have resolved Geoff Hurst's World Cup Final goal in 1966? I doubt it

Agonising denial

It would be better if goal-line technology were abandoned. It is never going to resolve very much because Lampard-type incidents are so infrequent. The English audience might remember one involving a wonderful long-range lob by Pedro Mendes, then of Tottenham Hotspur, at Manchester United seven years ago, and the agonising denial of Chesterfield in an FA Cup semi-final in 1997, but not much else unless they are to go back to 1966, when Geoff Hurst was so famously favoured by a linesman from Azerbaijan.

Would goal-line technology even have resolved that? I doubt it. The English would have gladly accepted the goal and the rest of the world been unsure. Because even a computer cannot wholly be trusted. A computer, after all, prepares your bank statement – but you still check the figures from time to time. And there will be nothing to check the goal-line technology. I agree with Blatter. Let's stick to the human element. And that means monitors.

They would rescue us from only the obvious errors – those that could be identified without an undue delay in play – and there would still be plenty of room for controversy. There is a chance to get this right in March. And the IFAB should start by tearing up their agenda. WS

VIDEO ASSISTANCE FOR REFEREES: HOW IT WOULD WORK

- Monitors to be actively used only during matches that are televised, either live or for highlights purposes, by independent broadcasters - ie, not club channels.
- Principle that referees and the spectators should be on an equal footing, whether they have television or just rely on the naked eye. So no change in refereeing of lower-league, amateur or schools football.
- Review permitted only if it involves no undue interruption of play - in other words, equivalent to a consultation with a linesman.
- Fourth official's monitor to show only what the viewer sees, with no additional angles or interference by broadcasters.
- The fourth official to be of equal status to the match referee. Current duties, such as displaying substitute numbers, to be carried out by a fifth official.
- Fourth official to be out of sight and reach of managers, coaches, all club representatives and spectators. No appeals. No suggestions of subjects for review, except if coming from the fourth official or match referee.

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Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

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MARK GLEESON
in Bata

Cheats prosper at the Nations Cup

FIFA has turned a blind eye to blatant mercenary recruitment by co-hosts Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea's sensational 2-1 giant-killing of Senegal and subsequent passage to the quarter-finals of the African Nations Cup again highlighted the duplicity of teams away from the world spotlight who are filling their sides with mercenaries from other countries.

It is a growing phenomenon in Africa, where Burkina Faso recently faced being thrown out of the current tournament, only to win a case at the Court for Arbitration in Sport (CAS) in Switzerland that sets a dangerous precedent.

Neither FIFA nor the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has shown the slightest inclination to properly look into the background of players under suspicion, despite evidence that is easily accessed and interviews that admit the duplicity.

Equatorial Guinea have been bringing in foreign talent to strengthen their side for some years now. New-found oil wealth means players have been enticed with cash payments into being naturalised and making themselves available for international duty.

Of their squad at the 2012 African Nations Cup at least five did not qualify to play in terms of FIFA regulations.

The statutes of world football's governing body clearly state that players must either have a blood link with a country – which, as the Irish know only too well, can go as far back as a grandparent – or they must have spent five years in the country in order to be accepted as a naturalised player.

First-choice goalkeeper Danilo has never lived or played club football in Equatorial Guinea. He has only ever visited the country to play for the national side and was recruited by a previous coach, Antonio Dumas, who also controversially took players from his Brazilian homeland to play for Togo when he coached their national side.

Of the other Nations Cup heroes, defender Rui Fernando was born in Spain and is of Cape Verdian descent, while Thierry Fidjeu and Narcisse Ekanga are from neighbouring Cameroon. Daniel Ekedo is a Nigerian who plays in the lower leagues of Spain – Equatorial Guinea's former colonial master and where many of their side hail from.

Fidjeu, in an interview with a French website in October, told of how he had been approached by Equatorial Guinea two years ago, saying: "I had hoped to play for the "Indomitable Lions" [Cameroon] but my dreams did not come true. When Henri Michel approached me I decided to accept."

Purchase mercenaries

Frenchman Michel was coach of Equatorial Guinea for one year, resigning weeks before the African Nations Cup began because of alleged interference in his work. He had encouraged officials to purchase him as many mercenaries as possible because he felt he needed to strengthen the side to be competitive at the tournament.

As a result, he left out the players from Spain, with blood links to Equatorial Guinea, who had traditionally made up the bulk of the team.

Among them, Juvenal Edjogo from Sabadell put his name to a petition protesting the use of too many mercenaries. He argued: "I prefer playing and losing by three to four goals in the national team with all its players originally from the country than playing in a team made up of players coming from different countries. You have a goalkeeper coming from Brazil, a striker from Nigeria, a midfielder from Cameroon? It's no longer a national team but a club side."

Once Michel left, Edjogo and the majority of the Spanish contingent won a recall, with the former even captaining the team at the finals in place of the injured Rodolfo Bodipo.

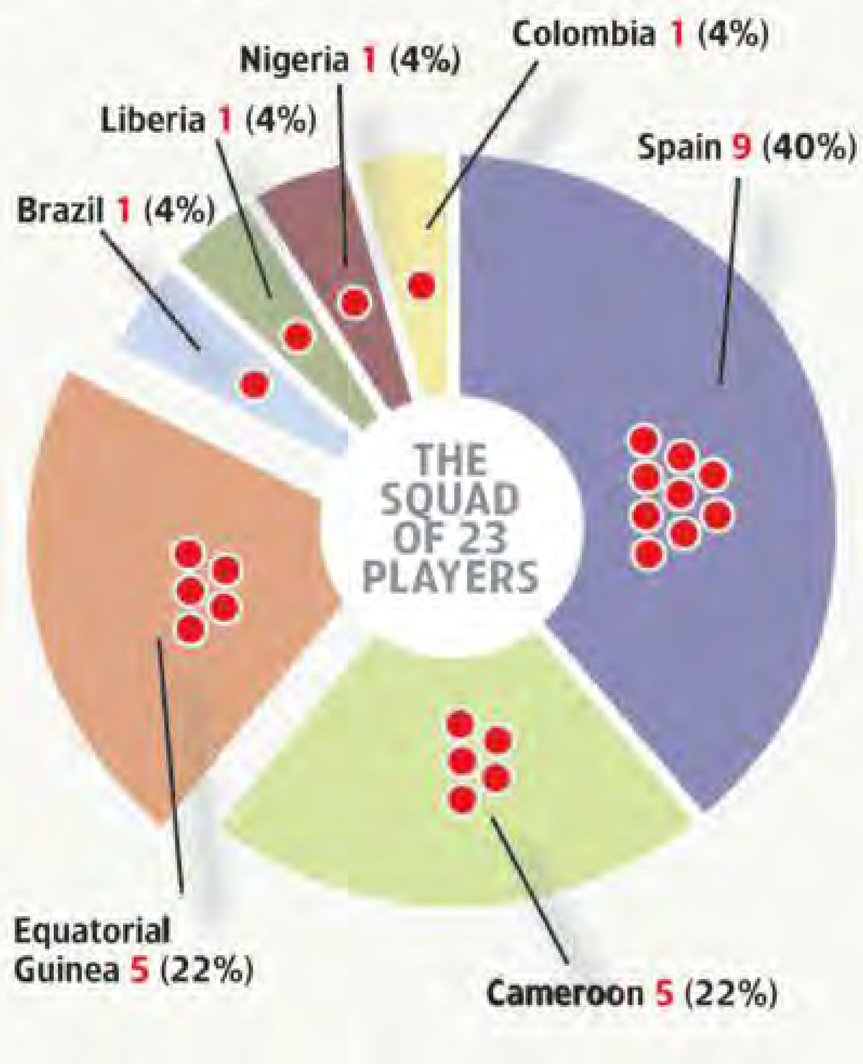
Former international Benjamin Zarandona, who has one Spanish parent and one from Equatorial Guinea, told Spain's sports paper *AS* in November: "Henri Michel hated anything to do with Spain. The team no longer speaks Spanish; it's all French now."

Among the Francophiles, Fidjeu said he was motivated not by money but a chance to play international football and compete at the African Nations Cup finals. His career has taken him from Union Douala in Cameroon to clubs in Malta, Austria, Israel and now Turkey. He has had no residency in Equatorial Guinea or immediate blood links and is therefore ineligible.

This is also the case with his

EQUATORIAL GUINEA'S SQUAD MAKE UP

Birthplace of the players representing the team at the African Nations Cup



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On the defensive... Equatorial Guinea's wall stands firm against a free-kick from Zambia's Hijani Himoonde in their final group match

Cameroonian compatriot Ekanga and Ekedo from Nigeria, yet the trio all played in November's World Cup qualifier against Madagascar. Which begs the question: what action might FIFA now be prepared to take against them for cheating?

FIFA expelled Equatorial Guinea's women's side from the recent Olympic qualifiers after they went to the World Cup in Germany with ineligible payers. And it is some irony, then, that CAF nominated their Brazilian goalkeeper, Miriam Silva, as a candidate for the Women's Footballer of the Year.

Equatorial Guinea, however, are not alone. Burkina Faso tried a similar policy, initiated by Portuguese coach Paulo Duarte, to strengthen the squad. He approached African players he knew from his time in Portuguese club football to play for the Burkinabe, capping two of them: Herve Zengue of Cameroon and the Ivory Coast-born Stephane Agbre.

Burkina Faso's deployment of Zengue in the qualifiers led to a protest from beaten opponents Namibia, which was rejected by CAF – although not on the grounds of Zengue's qualification, but on procedural technicalities.

Burkina Faso claimed Zengue was a citizen through marriage, though they offered no evidence, but this does not qualify him under FIFA rules. At considerable cost, Namibia took their case to CAS in January, when Burkina suddenly offered up evidence of Zengue's alleged life spent since childhood in the country, which then did allegedly qualify him under FIFA rules on residency.

> "A goalkeeper from Brazil, a striker from Nigeria, a midfielder from Cameroon? It's not a national team but a club side" Equatorial Guinea's Juvenal Edjogo

Given the long history of African federations falsifying documentation it seemed incredulous that CAS accepted this at face value. Now the door is open for similar subterfuge, as long as the paperwork looks valid. Zengue's later omission from Burkina Faso's squad for the African Nations Cup finals was seen by some as an admission of guilt

The Central African Republic's bid to solve a goalkeeping crisis last October is a vivid example of what now happens around the continent. For a key Nations Cup qualifying game in Algeria, coach Jules Acorsi tried to import a keeper of African origin to replace his suspended first choice, Geoffrey Lembet.

Striker Ibrahim Bouhari said: "The coach asked me if I knew of a goalkeeper [of Central African Republic nationality to replace him]. The only one I knew played in the lower leagues in France and had never played international football.

"To our surprise we found a Malian on the list of call-ups as a goalkeeper. Accorsi had brought him in but he did not have a passport. In the end our usual No 2 goalkeeper got to play." WS

• *Read Mark Gleeson's full report on the African Nations Cup from Gabon and Equatorial Guinea in next month's issue*

SID LOWE
in Madrid

Simeone puts life back into Atletico

Former player is latest coach to attempt revival in Madrid

The future... Simeone with two young Atletico fans

They are calling it the "Simeone Effect" and it is making a difference. An Atletico Madrid player during two different spells, captain of the double-winning team, an idol for the fans, aggressive, determined and committed, Diego Simeone always said that he would come back to the club as coach one day. This winter, after six years and six clubs in Argentina, it happened. And, so far, neither party could be happier.

Atletico have been here before. Few supporters are as world-weary as theirs. With each new season they wonder if this will be their year, only to have to accept, with crushing inevitability, it will not. Even when they did win the Europa League, even when that should have been a fresh start, it didn't work. Within the year, the coach had gone and the good times forgotten. New coaches always appear to promise a new era but the same old problems emerge.

One of the reasons is that some things – some people – never change. And the problem is not so much on the bench as in the directors' box.

Simeone was the 49th managerial appointment at the Estadio Vicente Calderon since the Gil family took over the club in 1987. Since 1996, when the late Jesus Gil's son, Miguel Angel Gil Marin, took over as CEO, they have averaged 14 new players a season.

> Listening to Simeone, the words "commitment, sacrifice and effort" are repeated over and over

Simeone was the populist option, chosen as much because he could help bring peace to the stands and protect the owners from supporters' ire as for his ability to turn things round. And yet he has turned things round.

When Simeone took over, Atletico were 10 points off a Champions League place. By the start of February, they were just two points adrift and unbeaten in four games. There are 1,300 new season ticket holders and the team have won two successive away games for the first time in over two years. In four games, they have won three and drawn at Malaga. Seven points have been earned in their last three away games, while under previous boss Gregorio Manzano they managed a solitary point on the road in 15 matches.

On the playing side, one big move has taken place: the departure of Jose Antonio Reyes to Sevilla. It was a good move for the club as Reyes' relationship with the former coach was fraught with difficulties and he wanted to go. Simeone made no effort to recover him for the cause. He had decided Atletico were better off without him – and he was right. Other players appreciated the move and the benefits have been felt.

Listening to Simeone, the same words are repeated over and over, words that were anathema to Reyes: commitment, sacrifice, effort. Even when he is asked specifically what it is he wants to do in purely footballing terms, beyond commitment, sacrifice and effort, Simeone replies: "*Compromiso*" [commitment]. It may seem ludicrously simple, somewhat cliched, but it is working. In the short term, at least.

Atletico are a more aggressive, faster, tougher side now. There is more security, if not yet much flow, about central midfield. Adrian is finally getting a consistent run – and not just because of what he offers in attack but, more to the point, because of what he brings to the side in covering and endeavour. And Radamel Falcao is scoring goals again.

They are also more defensively sound. Atletico have scored eight times and not conceded any. Thibaut Courtois saved them three times in Pamplona against Osasuna but the number of shots he has had to face is dropping, from an average of almost five a game to 2.5. "We are better organised now, there is a great tactical discipline," says defender Diego Godin.

It is not always pretty and a message repeated on the training ground is "don't think, don't make mistakes – any doubts, get the ball as far away as possible".

"The team is working with much greater intensity and the results are good," says club president Enrique Cerezo. "Let's hope it continues."

That is the key. Plenty of coaches have started well at Atletico Madrid. Plenty more have finished badly. WS

COACHES IN THE LAST 25 YEARS

Paying the price...Atletico have had almost twice as many coaches as their city rivals

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Austerity hits home in Serie A

Cash-strapped clubs did few deals in the January transfer window

If football is a mirror that reflects the socio-economic realities around it, then the January transfer window in Italy was especially accurate. In a country struggling to deal with both a crippling national debt and the spectre of looming recession, it was no surprise that movements were distinctly low-key.

Even if there was plenty of low-scale action, this was a window without any outstanding big-name or big-money moves. Emblematic of the way the market went was the on-off-on-off deal which might have brought Manchester City's talented Argentinian striker Carlos Tevez to Milan.

In the end Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi intervened. With the reigning Serie A champions tempted to sell their 22-year-old Brazilian ace Pato to Paris Saint-Germain, the former Italian prime minister called a halt. Berlusconi argued that it made no sense to sell a good, young striker and replace him with a potentially "troublesome" customer in the shape of 28-year-old Tevez, a player who would also have been cup-tied for Milan's Champions League campaign.

Instead, Milan covered themselves with the purchase of another Argentinian, Catania's 27-year-old Maxi Lopez, who, is now in his third season in the Italian top flight. Bought on a £1.25million loan, with a £6.5m buyout clause, Lopez is a useful player but hardly one to set pulses racing among fans brought up on the likes of Van Basten, Weah and Shevchenko. Lopez does, however, fit in nicely with the "austerity" demands of a year when shares in Berlusconi's Mediaset TV empire fell by 51 per cent.

Likewise, even Internazionale owner, Massimo Moratti, the biggest spender of the last decade and more, played it canny and tight this time. When PSG upped their offer for Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta to £9.5m he said thank you very much and took the cash.

Elsewhere, arguably the most significant move remains that of 22-year-old Chilean striker Eduardo Vargas from Universidad de Chile to Napoli for £10m. However, this looks more and more like a purchase intended for next season but anticipated in order to head off rival bids from the likes of Chelsea and Roma. Having arrived at Napoli after a busy season that saw him play 70-odd top level games, Vargas may need time to both acclimatise and recoup energy.

Otherwise, the new year began with some very familiar sights. First of all, Juventus won three and drew one of their four games in January to remain out in front. Perhaps the most significant of those wins was the 2-1 home victory over Udinese, who were third at the time.

Played on a blustery, snowy night in Turin, this game represented a veritable *tour de force* by the league leaders in that their concentrated determination saw them pin the useful visitors into their own penalty area for much of the game. Clearly, there may be more talented sides than Juve around at the moment, but their level of commitment, as inspired by coach Antonio Conte, merits plenty of respect.

> Emblematic of the way the market went was Milan's on-off-on-off deal for Carlos Tevez

Investment...Napoli's Vargas (left) is one for the future

Familiar sight

Other familiar, indeed welcome, sights include that of 35-year-old Roma captain, Francesco Totti, scoring his 210th and 211th Serie A goals in a 5-1 Roma home win over Cesena. Totti's double against Cesena saw him move to fifth place in the all-time Serie A goalscorers' standings, behind Silvio Piola (274), Gunnar Nordahl (225), Giuseppe Meazza (216) and Jose Altafini (216).

Given the current form of Luis Enrique's Roma, the chances that Totti will shortly overhaul Meazza and Altafini must be good. Indeed such is the veteran's form that national coach Cesare Prandelli conceded that he would consider drafting him into Italy's Euro 2012 squad this summer if he maintains his current form. We will, however, take a large pinch of salt on that prognostication.

It was hardly a surprise that Novara coach Attilio Tesser was sent packing after a 2-0 loss at Palermo. Tesser now hands over the reins at bottom-of-the-table Novara to one of the old foxes of Italian coaching, 64-year-old Emiliano Mondonico, the one-time coach of Torino, Atalanta, Napoli and Fiorentina among others. Tesser, is the 10th coach in Serie A to be sacked since the beginning of the season. WS

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BRIAN HOMEWOOD in Berne

Xamax down and kicked out

As many predicted, Bulat Chagaev's takeover has ended in tears

Bulat Chagaev likes nothing more than nipping down to the local park early in the day and feeding the ducks. "I give bread to the ducks before work in the morning," he reveals. "A Swiss friend asked what I expect in return for pleasing such ducks. I told him nothing – my reward will come in heaven."

Sadly for Neuchatel Xamax, these were the only bills their Russian-born president was capable of dealing with.

In a mere eight months as president, Chagaev took the club from being Swiss Cup finalists, and on the brink of a place in the Europa League, to a destitute outfit who were unable to pay the players' wages or their social security contributions on time. The sorry affair ended with the Swiss Football League (SFL) stripping Xamax of their licence and kicking the team out of the championship. If ever there was an example of the damage uncaring, rich owners can do to a club, this was it.

In announcing its decision, the SFL said the club was guilty of a variety of offences, but the most serious concerned the suspicion that Chagaev had falsified a document from the Bank of America which had been used as a financial guarantee and was "proof" that he had $35million in his account.

The Swiss media had already taken great pleasure in publishing the letter which, rather like a scam email, was littered with odd grammar.

It read: "Dear Mr Chagaev, in response on your request of September 12, 2011, the Bank announced that on your bank account there is the sum of USD35,000,000, enough for annual funding of your football club "XAMAX" during season 2011-2012."

> "I'm very sad. This Bulat Chagaev has led Xamax to misery. I just don't understand the motives of this gentleman. Words fail me"
>
> **Former Xamax and Switzerland midfielder Heinz Hermann**

It had the Bank of America's logo superimposed on the top and, despite coming from a US institution, had the date in European format.

Chagaev, who has said from the outset that he has been misunderstood and persecuted, says the SFL has got it all wrong. "It's a repugnant decision," he maintains. "The league is punishing the players. I will not abandon the club."

Bizarrely, the squad – or what was left of it after Chagaev had sacked four more players at the start of the year – were in Dubai preparing for the second half of the season when the SFL pulled the plug. Nobody knew where the money from that trip came from, either.

"I can't explain why we're here," Victor Sanchez – one of Neuchatel's Spanish contingent, which also includes coach Victor Munoz – told *El Pais*. "We're in Dubai, but we haven't received a Euro. We don't understand a thing."

"The president has told us eight times that he has transferred the money but nothing happens."

Players said there were frequent cases of them having to leave their flats because the club had not paid the rent, and the same had happened with their hire cars. "At least we're free now, we know where we stand," added Sanchez.

Xamax now face life in the third division – a fate suffered by Lausanne Sport, Servette and Sion when they lost their licences due to financial problems over the last few years. Sion managed to get themselves promoted to the second division via a court ruling thanks to president Christian Constantin's familiarity with the legal system, but this is something that Chagaev would appear to lack. And if Xamax goes bankrupt it could even end up in an amateur league.

Rebuild the club

A group of long-time Xamax friends, led by former president Gilbert Facchinetti and FIFA director Walter Gagg, are hoping to rebuild the club, although they still have to wait for Chagaev to leave. "As long as Chagaev is owner of Xamax, we can't take it on," says Gagg. They had wanted to take over from previous president, Sylvio Bernasconi, when he quit in May, but Chagaev offered him more money.

FC Xamax was founded in 1912 and became Neuchatel Xamax in 1970 through a merger with rivals FC Cantonal. The club won the league championship in 1987 and 1988, and past coaches include Nestor Clausen and Roy Hodgson. They once reached the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup and the last 16 of the old European Cup.

Gilbert Gress, who coached the title-winning teams, believes that Xamax's plight is a reflection of the problems faced by clubs and leagues in smaller countries. Before the Chagaev takeover, the club – which has a small catchment area, with Basle and Berne's Young Boys both within an hour's drive – had struggled for years to make ends meet.

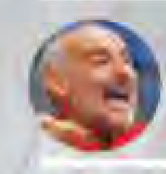
"Since the Bosman case, it has

XAMAX COACHES UNDER BULAT CHAGAEV AND GAMES PLAYED

Didier Olle-Nicolle
0 GAMES

Bernard Challandes
4 GAMES

Sonny Anderson
0 GAMES



Francois Ciccolini
3 GAMES

Joaquin Caparros
4 GAMES

Victor Munoz
11 GAMES

become more and more difficult for small countries," says Gress. "Before, each club had a coach for the first team and a coach for the second team, 15 or 16 players and maybe three youngsters.

"The players came from the region, the canton or maybe the neighbouring canton. Everyone identified with the club, that's how it was when I was at Xamax. There was more harmony and the human factor was important.

"Today, players can move abroad more easily. There's a lot of coming and going. Each team has five or six coaches and 30 players. Who can pay for all that? It's all more complex."

Chagaev took over after Bernasconi decided he'd had enough of pumping his own money into a club. He began

Cause for concern...Chagaev

by firing coach Didier Olle-Nicolle on his first day in charge and bringing in old warhorse, Bernard Challandes, for the remainder of the season. In four games in charge, Challandes rescued Xamax from the threat of relegation but lost the Cup Final to Sion – a game which featured an infamous incident when Chagaev burst into the dressing room with his bodyguards at half-time and told the players: "I'll kill you all."

The end...Xamax have been stripped of their top-flight status

Kicked upstairs

Sonny Anderson became the next coach, until Chagaev discovered the Brazilian did not have the necessary licence. So he was kicked upstairs to become general manager and Francois Ciccolini took his place on the bench for the new season. In the meantime, Chagaev had parted company with the club's sponsors and fired the administrative staff, leaving the club unable to print tickets for the new season. Instead, fans were given pieces of paper with the ticket price handwritten.

Brazilian goalkeeper Rodrigo Galatto was picked for the opening home game against Lucerne, even though he had arrived from Malaga only two days before and was unfamiliar with the artificial pitch at the club's Stade de la Maladiere. He was fired after one game, while Ciccolini and Anderson followed two matches later. Joaquin Caparros, who led Athletic Bilbao last season, replaced them, but lasted only four matches. He was replaced by Munoz, who was in charge at the time Xamax lost their licence.

The SFL maintains that Chagaev had met its licensing requirements when he took over, and it did at least act quickly. The impression is, however, that the SFL had taken a bureaucratic approach and was more interested in Chagaev ticking the right boxes in terms of providing documents rather than using common sense. His much-publicised links to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who is accused of human rights abuses, should have rung alarm bells.

"I'm very sad," says distinguished former Xamax and Switzerland midfielder Heinz Hermann. "This Bulat Chagaev has led Xamax to misery. I just don't understand the motives of this gentleman. Words fails me."

Meanwhile, the Swiss Super League, never the most enticing competition at the best of times, has now been reduced to nine teams for the second half of the season – one of whom, Sion, have had 36 points deducted over the FIFA transfer ban affair.

Before the league restarted in February, Sion were adrift at the bottom on minus five points. However, Xamax's demise has handed Sion the lifeline of a play-off against a team from the second tier, rather than automatic relegation. And they could even avoid a play-off altogether if they can catch eighth-placed Lausanne Sport, who have been awful and managed just 11 points in their opening 18 games. WS

ROY KITSON
in Belfast

Battling the nation's young talent drain

New national boss bids to arrest the flow of players to the Republic

Michael O'Neill officially took charge of the national team on February 1. Fresh from his success in the Republic with Shamrock Rovers, where he won back-to-back league titles and became the first manager to guide an Irish team into the Europa League group stages, he will be hoping to reverse a decline in Northern Ireland's fortunes.

O'Neill, who won 31 caps for Northern Ireland between 1988 and 1995, takes over from Nigel Worthington after a dreadfully disappointing Euro 2012 campaign which saw the team finish fifth out of six in their qualifying group, with just nine points from 10 games, and only the Faroe Islands below them.

The 42-year-old is a popular appointment, having emerged from a final shortlist of three alongside Jim Magilton and Iain Dowie. O'Neill is under no illusions as to the size of his task, but sees the key to success as building a club atmosphere in the national squad.

O'Neill is the first Ulster-born Catholic to take charge of the national side since former Celtic midfielder Bertie Peacock 50 years ago. A key element in the new man's vision will be his desire to reverse a trend which has become a major stumbling block to progress.

In recent years much young talent, born in the province and brought through the youth system, has opted to play for the Republic of Ireland at senior level.

The situation is made possible by FIFA rules that allow any player from Northern Ireland to declare for the Football Association of Ireland.

Anybody born in Northern Ireland has the right to an Irish passport as well as a UK one, and if a player has represented Northern Ireland at junior level but not senior level, he can switch to the Republic. Everton midfielder Darron Gibson and Stoke City defender Marc Wilson (both 24) have already made this decision, while James McLean of Sunderland looks to be following. This worrying trend has resulted in the likely loss of other young talent such as Shane Duffy of Everton.

A perceived impression that Northern Ireland is a "Protestant" team which is supported overwhelmingly by Protestants is a major reason why many Catholic players opt for the Republic, with an additional factor that the Republic of Ireland under Giovanni Trapattoni presently have a much higher profile than their Northern counterparts.

A variety of other reasons have been cited, from the playing of "God Save the Queen" and the Windsor Park venue, home of Linfield, for home internationals. On one infamous night in 2001, during an international against Norway, midfielder Neil Lennon, who had recently joined Celtic, was booed and jeered by a section of the crowd every time he touched the ball.

Those jeers were condemned by the majority of the Northern Irish support and for a time Lennon was able to continue playing for Northern Ireland without a repeat. Then in August 2002, shortly before an international at home to Cyprus, Lennon was told by police that a threat, said to be from loyalist paramilitaries, had been made on his life. He immediately retired from international football.

> "We are not the wealthiest association but a lot of resources have been put into developing young players"
> Michael O'Neill

Longer career

O'Neill is leaving the politics of the situation to the administrators, stressing his intention to concentrate on the individual benefits to players of opting for Northern Ireland, including the likelihood of enjoying a longer international career.

He says: "The IFA is not the wealthiest association in the world, but a lot of resources have been put into developing young players. We want an inclusive team, and if we can put an exciting young, hungry team on the pitch I believe that success will follow.

"And I will be looking to persuade some of those young players who have opted for the Republic of Ireland to reconsider their decisions."

O'Neill can cite the examples of current internationals Damien Johnson and Chris Baird, both Catholics who opted to play for Northern Ireland, as role models for the future. He also wants his current crop of players to show the same desire and ambition to play for Northern Ireland that was a feature of his own playing career, which included spells at Newcastle United, Dundee United and Hibernian.

However, he faces a daunting task. With a 2014 World Cup qualifying group containing Russia, Portugal, Israel, Luxembourg and Azerbaijan, Northern Ireland must be considered rank outsiders to qualify for their first finals since 1986. WS

Question of choice...the Irish national anthem is played ahead of Northern Ireland's game against the Republic of Ireland in the Nations Cup in Dublin

Storemags

NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

The trouble with Ballack

Leverkusen have cause to regret signing the ex-Germany captain

Off...Ballack (left) is substituted against Mainz

The most resonant story of the January window was not a transfer deal but the widely announced midnight flit from Bayer Leverkusen of Michael Ballack.

After seriously falling out with both Leverkusen coach Robin Dutt and the power-brokers at the Rhineland outfit, the 35-year-old Ballack – reportedly a target for a couple of Premier League sides, Montreal of MLS and Malaga in Spain – must have been sorely tempted to pick up his kitbag and go. But in the end the rumours turned to dust and he will now have to grin and bear it at the BayArena until his contract is up at the end of season.

The Ballack-Leverkusen break-up dramatically erupted into full view during Bayer's 3-2 home win against Mainz. Subdued and sluggish, Ballack was substituted after an hour and did not take kindly to the "offence", shaking his head and refusing to shake Dutt's hand.

Most unhappy to see Ballack hauled off, a large number of Leverkusen fans whistled and jeered their coach. But if the ex-national skipper thought the club bean-counters were also going to back him, he was in for a shock.

First, director of sport Rudi Voller said "Michael simply was playing badly and I would have taken him off before half-time", then chairman Wolfgang Holzhauser not only accused him of inflaming the situation and not affording Dutt sufficient respect but also intimated that the veteran had failed to deliver since returning in the summer of 2010.

With Ballack choosing to keep his own counsel, it was left to his agent, Dr Michael Becker, to lead the counter-attack, stating: "In the winter-break training camp everyone was praising Michael for his displays in the first-half of the championship.

"The coach and the team are booed against Mainz, and since it is obviously not possible to part company with Robin Dutt another scapegoat has to be found – and they identified one in Michael."

The following week, in a 1-1 draw at Werder Bremen, Ballack was restricted to bench-warming duties and though Dutt claims their relationship is healthy enough, the truth is that the midfielder seems to have reached the end of the road in the Bundesliga.

What is clear is that the Leverkusen top brass bitterly regret their decision to re-sign Ballack after an eight-year hiatus at Bayern Munich and Chelsea. They thought he still had something to offer, that his technical class, experience and aura would prove the perfect counterpoint to the massed ranks of youthful talent at the club.

It never really worked, but while it is a shame that the reputation of a once-great player is going south, they do say "never go back" for a reason.

Transfer business

While the Ballack exit did not materialise, at least some mid-term transfer business was successfully completed. Following an excellent stint on loan at Bayer, young goalkeeper Bernd Leno is now permanently on the payroll – and with a large portion of the £6million they received, Stuttgart bought Hoffenheim's Bosnia striker Vedad Ibisevic.

Wolfsburg's Felix Magath splashed out almost £25m on eight players - including Swiss defender Ricardo Rodriguez (Zurich), Portuguese midfielder Vieririnha (PAOK) and wing-back Giovanni Sio (Sion). To the untrained eye Magath might look desperate, but history tells us he does know what he is doing. Bundesliga titles with Bayern and Wolfsburg prove there is method to the apparent madness.

The league also has a pair of freshly installed coaches, with Michael Skibbe replacing Markus Babbel at Hertha, and Christian Streich taking over from Marcus Sorg at struggling Freiburg. WS

THE CLUB CAREER OF MICHAEL BALLACK 1997-NOW

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER
in Mexico City

War on drugs, Mexican-style

Football is holding out against the barons who now control large parts of the country

Since president Felipe Calderon assumed office in December 2006, the Mexican government has been engaged in an open war against drug trafficking. It is estimated that the conflict has resulted in over 60,000 deaths and no end seems in sight.

While the authorities have captured some of the most important drug lords, the big cartels remain in control of large areas of the country, especially in the north and west. Given this scenario, it is surprising that the narcotics trade has – up to now – not seriously infiltrated Mexican football.

In fact, one of the biggest achievements accomplished by the Mexican football federation and its general secretary, Decio De Maria, is to have avoided a situation like the one in Colombia in the 1980s, when the barons owned the biggest teams and used them to launder money and gain credibility.

Nevertheless, in recent years there have been a number of episodes where organised crime has reared its ugly head in Mexican football.

The first was in 2004 when the federation decided to disaffiliate top-flight teams Irapuato and Queretaro, who both had links to drug trafficking. In the latter case, it followed complaints from several players who were paid their salaries from huge bags of cash that the club's owners kept in the trunk of a van.

In 2008 a police operation ended in the arrests of the owner and several members of the staff of second division Nueva Italia during a friendly against America. They were accused of having links with drug trafficking and the Gulf Cartel, one of the most powerful groups operating in Mexico. The federation immediately announced the disaffiliation of the team hailing from the western state of Michoacan, one of the areas most affected by the drug trade and also where president Calderon was born.

> Ortiz told the authorities he had accumulated such large debts he decided to join the kidnappers' gang

Two gunshots

The most important episode so far occurred last year. In the 40th minute of the Primera Division game between Santos Laguna and Morelia, two gunshots were clearly heard in the vicinity of the TSM Stadium in the northern city of Torreon. The players fled to the dressing rooms and fans first threw themselves to the floor of the stands for cover before jumping on to the pitch to avoid getting hit. The match was abandoned and, although no injuries or deaths occurred, the federation decided to increase security at all stadiums.

The latest episode was the first to affect a relatively important player. On January 4 rumours began circulating that Omar Ortiz, a goalkeeper who is currently serving a two-year ban for testing positive for steroids, had been kidnapped in Monterrey, the most important city in the north and one of the most affected by drug trafficking.

Three days later the rumour turned full circle as news outlets reported Ortiz had not been abducted, but instead was part of a gang of kidnappers and had been arrested. A few hours later he was brought before reporters in handcuffs, along with others linked to the Gulf Cartel.

The role of Ortiz, nicknamed "The Cat" for his pale green eyes, was to investigate potential victims and decide who should be kidnapped. He had participated in two of the 20 kidnappings carried out by the gang, which is also engaged in selling drugs – an activity in which Ortiz was not involved, although he admitted to being an occasional user.

Ortiz had played nearly 300 games in the top flight with Monterrey, Jaguares and Necaxa, and won a national-team cap in 2002. Although at 35 he was far from being an elite player, he was considered one of the best second-choices in Mexico when he was banned in 2009 for failing a drug test after a Libertadores Cup match with Monterrey.

According to statements given to the authorities, Ortiz claimed his ban had left him without wages and he had accumulated such large debts that he decided to join the gang. The Mexican media claim he would have received about 100,000 pesos (£4,900) for his participation in the kidnappings.

The federation has not issued any statement on the situation, although De Maria himself believes that, despite all the efforts, football is not fully protected from drug trafficking.

"The environment of the whole of Mexican society is a very complex one and no one can say that these people will not get involved in football," he said. "Nevertheless, we are working to prevent it from happening and are taking the necessary measures in case it happens. We have already expelled teams involved in drug trafficking and have absolutely no fear of expelling any others we discover are related to crime in any way."

However, it would seem that they are the only ones without fear. In Mexico there is no doubt that, sooner or later, the large cartels will try to take a share of the spoils of the big business that football represents in the country.

According to a board member of a Primera Division team based in Mexico City: "So far, the federation has done a good job and the fact big companies like Televisa and Cerveceria Modelo are the owners of the teams also helps, but the amount of money involved in football is, without doubt, a big turn-on and I'm sure cartels will try to be involved.

"The key to prevent a massive takeover will be the reaction of the authorities, both from the government and from the federation. For now, we can only hope for the best."

Explaining why he preferred to remain anonymous, he explained: "I have no fear of reprisals, but in the current environment, no precaution can be considered exaggerated." WS

THE VIEW FROM...MEXICO

RÉCORD

"The cat is in the bag"

Headline in best-selling sports newspaper *Record* on the day that Omar "The Cat" Ortiz was arrested

"His detention is a proof of the degree of decadence and corruption that our society is going through"

The president of Mexico, Felipe Calderon

"He has just stained Mexican football"

Mexican goalkeeper Jose De Jesus Corona

"He was a very good team-mate. Someone should have helped him when he was suspended, but now it's too late"

Chile defender Ismael Fuentes, who played for Jaguares with Ortiz

Under arrest...Omar Ortiz (right) is escorted by an armed policeman on his way to being paraded before the media in Monterrey

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STEVE MENARY

Club side helps fuel World Cup dream

The tiny Caribbean nation get set to take on the might of the USA

Progress...players and fans celebrate the victory over Haiti

On June 8, the tiny Caribbean nation of Antigua & Barbuda will take on the United States of America in the opening game of their World Cup qualifying group.

But the national team's place in the third round of the CONCACAF qualifiers – they are in a group that also includes Guatemala and Jamaica – is no quirk of the fixture list. It has been earned.

Five successive wins, including a shock 1-0 victory over 1974 World Cup finalists Haiti, saw Antigua & Barbuda win their second-stage group. And for former Chesterfield midfielder Tom Curtis, the team's stunning progress has been vindication for his brave decision to quit a comfortable job coaching at Loughborough University in England to take up the post of national team coach.

Vindicated ...Curtis

> "The Barracuda team is effectively a development tool for the national side"
> National coach, Tom Curtis

"I had been at Loughborough for five years and wanted something new," explains Curtis. "I knew Bryan Hamilton, the former Northern Ireland manager who had done some work over here.

"He informed me they were looking for someone so I took the plunge."

While the Antigua & Barbuda FA runs three domestic leagues, last year the club game took on a different dimension when the ABFA's general secretary, Gordon Derrick, and a group of local businessmen entered the Antigua-based Barracuda club in North America's United Soccer League, the level below Major League Soccer.

Curtis was recruited to coach both the national team and Barracuda, who won nine of 24 fixtures in their debut season but finished bottom of USL Pro League's American Conference. "We intend to do better this year," says Curtis, who must balance strengthening the team with other objectives.

Antigua Barracuda can use up to seven overseas players, and last season they included Saint Kitts & Nevis' Orlando Mitchum and Chris Harvey of Jamaica, but nurturing local talent for the national team is the chief aim.

Curtis adds: "The model for the Barracuda team is we give locally-based players the opportunity to train professionally and play at the highest level possible.

"The franchise is effectively a development tool for the national team [and] has been extremely effective in terms of bringing players through."

Before Curtis took control, a number of UK-based players were involved with the national team, including Mikele Leigertwood, who made his debut in 2008 in the Caribbean Cup while at Queens Park Rangers. Now with Championship side Reading, Leigertwood, whose mother is Antiguan, has seen the benefits brought by both Curtis and Antigua Barracuda.

"The first time I played it was more off the cuff," admits Leigertwood.

"Now they've developed a whole lot in terms of understanding and positional awareness, and are more organised. That's why we beat Haiti."

Four England-based players started alongside seven locals against Haiti. With spirits high, the ABFA would now like to bring in players such as Nottingham Forest's former England under-21 striker Dexter Blackstock for the next stage of a campaign that is generating huge local interest.

While some Barracuda games attracted 5,000 fans, there were 7,000 for the victory over Haiti at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and Curtis is hoping for capacity crowds of 10,000 for the home World Cup qualifiers. He remains realistic about further progress, but says: "We are difficult to beat, organised and most importantly have a fantastic team spirit. On top of all that we have some fantastic young talent." WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Antigua & Barbuda is a former British colony in the Caribbean Sea that gained its independence in 1981.

Population: 88,000
Size: 171 sq m
Capital: St John's
Language: English
Religion: mainly Protestant

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JOEL RICHARDS
in Buenos Aires

Gang of four fail in plot to avoid drop

Struggling San Lorenzo's plan to reform league is rejected

Maybe it was the various frustrated attempts to bolster the squad. Perhaps it was the increasingly fervent criticism in the media and on internet forums. Maybe it was the 37-degree summer heat that made for even more uncomfortable reading of the relegation table. Or perhaps it was just realising the 2012 clausura was around the corner, and something – anything – needed to be done.

Whatever it was, desperate times called for desperate measures, or at least so thought a group of four clubs, headed by San Lorenzo. Together with fellow strugglers Olimpo, Tigre and Newell's Old Boys, they tried to arrange an informal meeting with the authorities to put forward their plan. A reform of the league structure was on the agenda, with a bottom line: suspend relegation for this season. There would be the suggestion of an expanded first division as of next season, with promotion from the second tier but no traffic in the opposite direction.

No sooner was the proposal made public, however, than the idea was roundly rejected. The Argentinian FA (AFA) afforded little credit to the idea. Sergio Marchi, the players' union secretary-general, immediately stated that if so much as a comma was touched on the current agreement there would be a strike. Marchi said: "The club presidents who dreamt up this idea must have been either drunk or in need of psychological help."

Public outcry

League reform in Argentina is not uncommon and it is not even a question of rummaging through dusty archives or bringing out grainy newsreel to uncover similar proposals. Just six months ago the AFA voted, and approved, a new format that merged the top two divisions to make a 38-team league. This idea, widely believed to be a government proposal to offset the depression suffered by 18 million supporters after River Plate's relegation in an electoral year, was scrapped in the face of public outcry and shelved...for the time being.

While the latest proposal may not prosper, it does point to the degree of anxiety at San Lorenzo, the first of Argentina's big clubs to be relegated from the top flight, in 1981. That relegation heralded the introduction of the three-year points averages, on the basis that the top sides going down was bad for football and the averages would offer a stay of execution for a poor year.

As happened to River Plate in 2011, however, that could be the very system that endangers San Lorenzo's survival this year. The "*Ciclon*" ended the 2009-10 season in 10th place and were 14th in the following campaign. At the midway point of this season they ended 17th. Going into the clausura, San Lorenzo are in the relegation play-off position. Ten defeats in 19 matches in the apertura and a change of coaches, not to mention the club's *barra brava* entering the dressing room and exchanging punches with first-team players, left a bleak outlook at the club in December. The pre-season compounded the pressure. Coach Leonardo Madelon has been unable to secure the signature either of Matias Rodriguez, who recently won the Sudamericana Cup with Universidad de Chile, or Godoy Cruz midfielder Diego Villar. Performances in friendlies have already set off alarm bells.

A vast improvement over the coming season is required, but Madelon is not alone in trying to rescue a club for which he once played.

Former Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino turned down a lucrative offer from Colombia to take charge of their national side and returned to his home town of Rosario. His job is to try to steer Newell's Old Boys clear of the fate that befell their cross-city enemies Rosario Central in 2010 when they dropped down a division. With just one win in the apertura, and only 13 goals in 19 matches, Martino has little time to turn around the club's fortunes.

> "The club presidents who thought up this idea must have been drunk or in need of psychological help"
>
> Players' union secretary general Sergio Marchi

The pressure is somewhat different at Boca Juniors, where the chief concern is maintaining the performance levels they displayed in winning the apertura and remaining undefeated. Coach Julio Falcioni has kept the same squad of players and brought midfielder Pablo Ledesma back from Catania.

After some neat work in the offices, he also reached a deal to bring Uruguayan striker Santiago Silva back to Buenos Aires after a disappointing spell at Fiorentina. Silva is only eligible for the Libertadores Cup this season, but rather than posing a problem, it perhaps resolves an issue for Falcioni. Boca's impressive striking options, which include Dario Cvitanich, Pablo Mouche, the convalescing Lucas Viatri and promising youngsters Nicolas Bladi and Sergio Araujo, requires squad rotation, particularly if they are to challenge in the league and in the Libertadores.

While Boca, together with Velez, Lanus, Godoy Cruz and Arsenal de Sarandi, prepare for the Libertadores, the question in Argentina is who can challenge for the title? The difference between Boca and the chasing pack last season was a hefty 12 points.

Runners-up Racing lost coach Diego Simeone, who took the reins at Atletico Madrid, and replaced him with veteran Alfio Basile. A throat operation aside – when he quipped there would be

ARGENTINIAN RELEGATION PLACES BEFORE THE START OF THE CLAUSURA

Points per game are averaged out over the last three seasons

		09-10	10-11	11-12	Total pts	Total games	Average
14	Newell's Old Boys	69	42	16	127	95	1.337
15	Arsenal	46	57	24	127	95	1.337
16	Union	—	—	25	25	19	1.316
17**	All Boys	—	51	21	72	57	1.263
18**	San Lorenzo	52	47	19	118	95	1.242
19*	Tigre	32	50	27	109	95	1.147
20*	Olimpo	—	48	16	64	57	1.123

* Relegated ** Relegation play-offs

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Painful...San Lorenzo striker Bernardo Romeo feels the anguish

trouble if he lost his trademark gravelly voice – 68-year-old Basile is back at the club where he won the Libertadores Cup and World Club Cup as a player and the Supercopa as coach.

Racing fans have bemoaned the conservatism and failure to convert 10 draws into wins that would have pushed their title challenge foward under Simeone. Under Basile they will expect a more attacking philosophy. Basile will, in turn, hope Colombian playmaker Gio Moreno can rediscover the brilliant form he produced before his knee injury.

Of the three sides that ended level on points with Racing last year, the expectation to progress and push Boca is firmly on Velez Sarsfield, clausura champions in both 2009 and 2011.

Having brought in striker Mauro Obolo from Arsenal for a third spell at the club where he started his career, plus the well-travelled midfielder Federico Insua, coach Ricardo Gareca will also have to juggle his squad as the 2011 Libertadores semi-finalists fight for two trophies. Belgrano will miss Franco Vazquez, who moved to Palermo, while Colon will be hoping to see the positive side of Gabriel Batistuta, who has taken on the role of sporting director in Santa Fe.

Elsewhere, Independiente landed striker Ernesto Farias, who coach Ramon Diaz hopes will add the firepower to improve on last season's eighth place.

Estudiantes repatriated goalkeeper Mariano Andujar, meaning that nine of the players that won the 2009 Libertadores Cup are back at the club. The aim in La Plata is not only for a vast improvement on last season but also to deliver a suitable send-off for captain Juan Sebastian Veron, who delayed his retirement for one last campaign. WS

PLAYER Biography

Andrea Pirlo

Swapping Milan for Juventus has revitalised the long-serving Italy midfielder and proved a lot of people wrong. By Paddy Agnew

Success...Pirlo celebrates Fabio Grosso's opening goal in the 2-0 win against Germany in the 2006 World Cup semi-finals

If ever that curious Italian expression *"La classe non è acqua"*, literally meaning "class is not water", could be applied to a footballer, it might well be to Andrea Pirlo. What the saying really means is, if a player has real quality, real substance, then, in the end, it will show through.

As Juventus reached the midway point of this season's Serie A title contest – out in front at the top of the table and a point clear of reigning champions Milan – there was every indication that Pirlo's class was shining through, strong and bright.

There are obviously many factors in the current Juve success story – coach Antonio Conte, midfielder Claudio Marchisio, goalkeeper Gigi Buffon, even the club's new stadium – but most analysts would argue that there is no element more important than Pirlo.

With all due respect to such as Alessandro Del Piero and Roberto Baggio, it is at least arguable that Juventus have not had a genuine playmaker of the quality of Pirlo since the mid-1980s days of Michel Platini. Fittingly, the goal which sent Juve on their way to a 2-0 win over Atalanta on match day 19 came from yet another Pirlo "assist" as he laid on his stock-in-trade precision pass for Swiss defender Stephan Lichtsteiner's opening goal.

One extraordinary aspect to Pirlo's career is that he is living proof that not just one, but rather two, of the biggest club names in world football can get it wrong. We are talking about the Milan

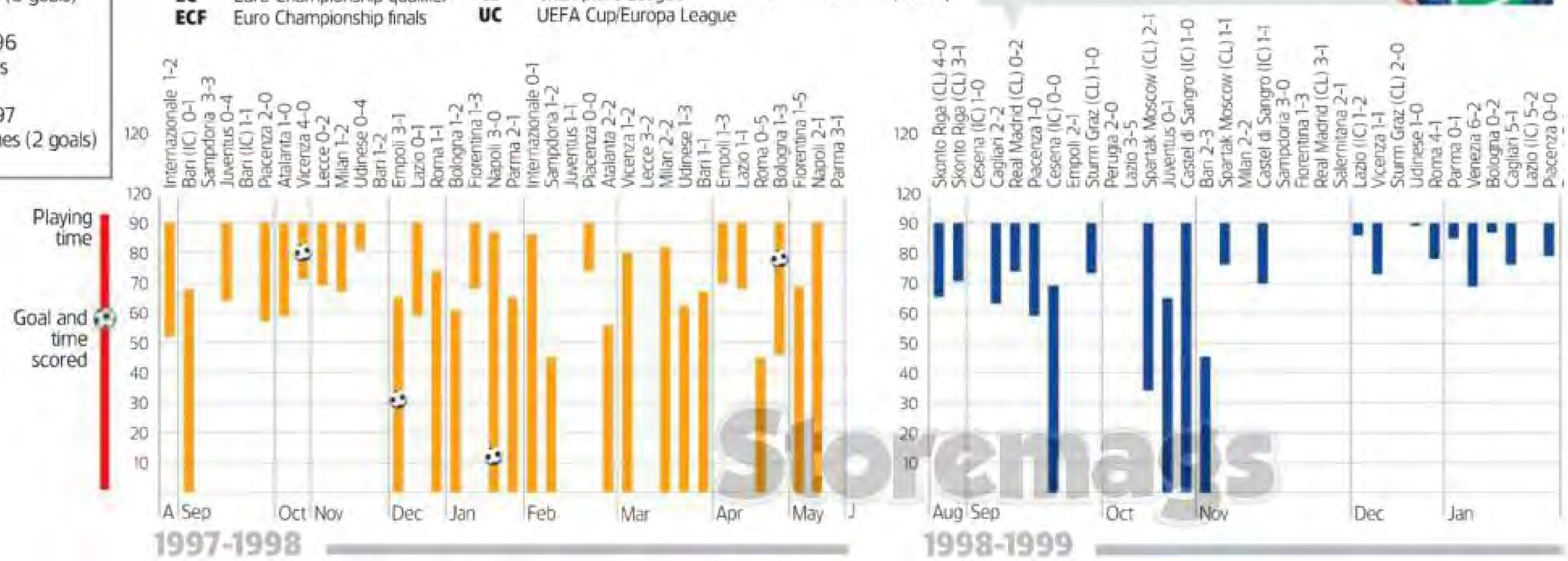
TIMELINE: EVERY MATCH, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY GOAL

BRESCIA RECORD 1994-97

- 1994-95 1 game (0 goals)
- 1995-96 0 games
- 1996-97 18 games (2 goals)

WC World Cup qualifier
WCF World Cup finals
EC Euro Championship qualifier
ECF Euro Championship finals
CON Confederations Cup
CWC Club World Cup
CL Champions League
UC UEFA Cup/Europa League
USC UEFA Super Cup
IC Italian Cup
IS Italian Super Cup

Sep 16, 1998 – Pirlo waits on the bench before coming on for his Champions League debut, against Real Madrid in the Bernabeu.



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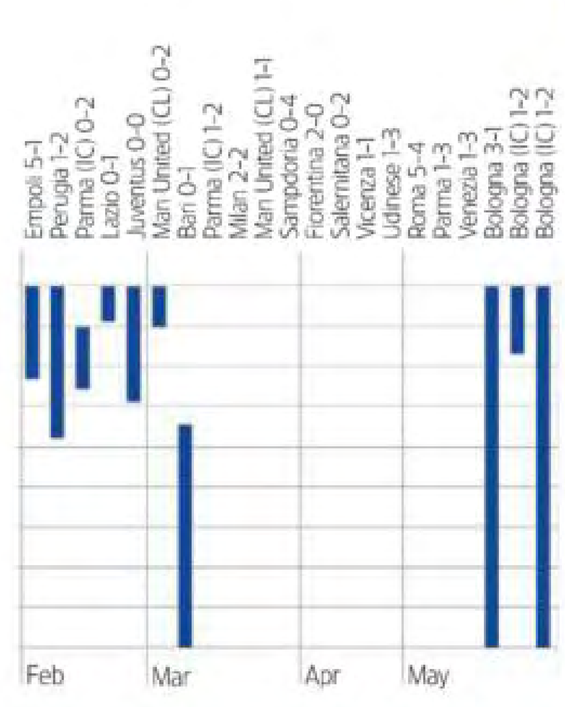
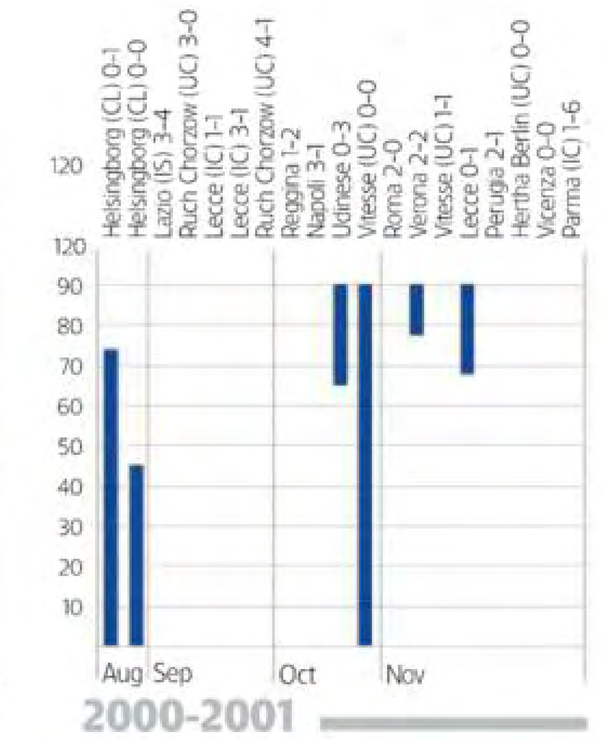
Sept 19, 1999 – makes his Reggina debut, away to Bologna, while on a loan spell from Internazionale.





FACT FILE

Andrea Pirlo

Nationality
Italian

Age
32 (19.05.79)

Place of birth
Flero, Lombardy, Italy

Height
5ft 9½ in (1.77m)

Position
Midfielder

Teams
Brescia
1995-1998 (49 games/6 goals)

Internazionale
1998-01 (40 games/0 goals)

Reggina (on loan)
1999-2000 (30 games/6 goals)

Brescia (on loan)
2001 (10 games/ 0 goals)

Milan
2001-present (401 games/41 goals)

Juventus
2011-present (19 games/0 goals)*

Italy
2001-present (81 games/9 goals)*

Honours
Milan
Club World Cup 2007; UEFA Champions League 2003, 2007; UEFA Super Cup: 2003, 2007; Serie A 2004, 2011; Italian Cup 2003; Italian Super Cup 2004

Italy
World Cup 2006

** up to and including 25.01.12*

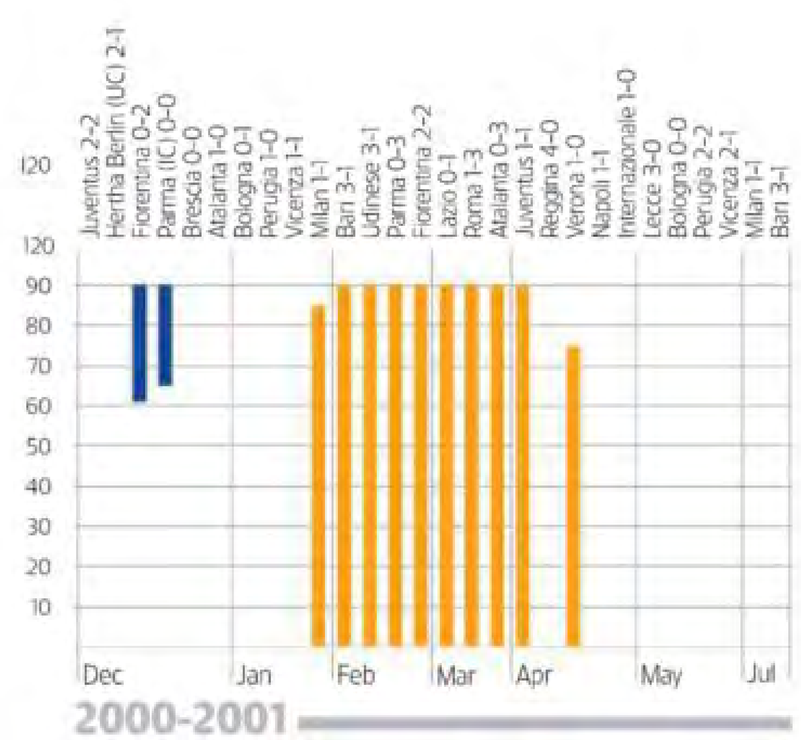
Old pals...Pirlo tussles with former Milan team-mate Clarence Seedorf

cousins, Internazionale and Milan. Inter got it wrong more than 10 years ago when they let the 21-year-old Pirlo leave, heading firstly for Brescia but ultimately for Milan and a decade of success. Many would suggest, however, that Milan also got it wrong last summer when they let him leave for Juventus on an out-of-contract free transfer.

After an injury-interrupted season that saw him make just 17 appearances in Serie A, it was understandable that Milan might have had reservations about 32-year-old Pirlo. He might have won a World Cup, two Champions League titles and two Serie A titles in his time at the San Siro, but injuries and age were against him. However, right from the opening game of the season in early September, when Juventus beat Parma 4-1 at home, it was clear that Milan had made a serious mistake.

"A player of his level and ability, he was the signing of the century," said Juve goalkeeper Buffon with a laugh after that game. "Watching him play today, I thought God exists because it is simply embarrassing how good he is. When I met [Milan managing director Adriano] Galliani during the summer, I said thanks to him

Mar 30, 2002 – celebrates with Filippo Inzaghi (right) after scoring his first goal for Milan in a 3-1 win against Parma at the San Siro.



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KEY Brescia Internazionale Reggina Milan Juventus Italy

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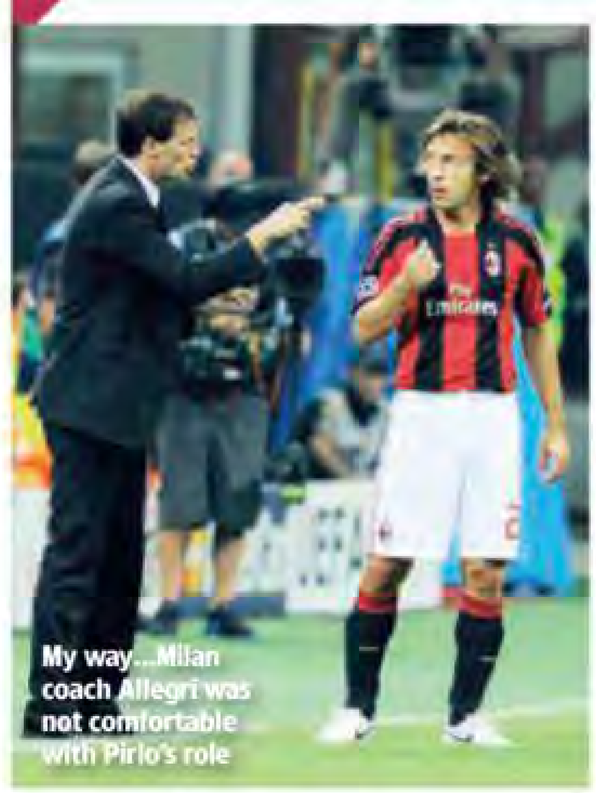
> "I thought, 'God exists', because it is just embarrassing how good Pirlo is"
>
> **Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon**


My way...Milan coach Allegri was not comfortable with Pirlo's role

As good as it gets... holding the World Cup after beating France in 2006

and told him that he really is trying to even up the title contest."

More recently, England manager Fabio Capello, himself a former coach of both Milan and Juventus, expressed the same sense of disbelief. After watching the 2-0 win over Atalanta, Capello observed of Pirlo: "I'm amazed that Milan let him go. I still don't understand it.

"You can always get it wrong when you're buying a player, but not when you are letting one go."

But former Inter and Italy defender Giuseppe Bergomi sees it differently, believing that, even if half of Italy now sees the departure of Pirlo as a mistake, it is also true that his deep-lying playmaker role did not fit easily into the Milan scheme of things, as envisaged by coach Massimiliano Allegri. On top of that, there may well have been problems about the length of a new contract which Milan were or were not willing to offer Pirlo.

It is possible, of course, that if Pirlo was a different, more flamboyant, more media-friendly, more "sexy" player, then Milan would have had a lot more difficulty letting him go as they would have encountered serious fan resistance. The point about Pirlo, though, is that for all his remarkable success, he has done a very effective job of keeping a low profile. Basically, when he is off the field, he is off the radar. No late nights, no drugs or betting scandals, no high-profile marriage break-up, no controversial TV interviews, no involvement in politics. Just football.

"I restrict myself to the dressing room and to the pitch, those are my boundaries," he told *La Stampa* in one of his rare interviews last summer. "I'm not interested in anything else. I don't like doing interviews, I don't like going on TV programmes. I do not have a Facebook page and I do not chat on Twitter. I don't have a website, even if there are people who have opened one in my name, complete with my photo..."

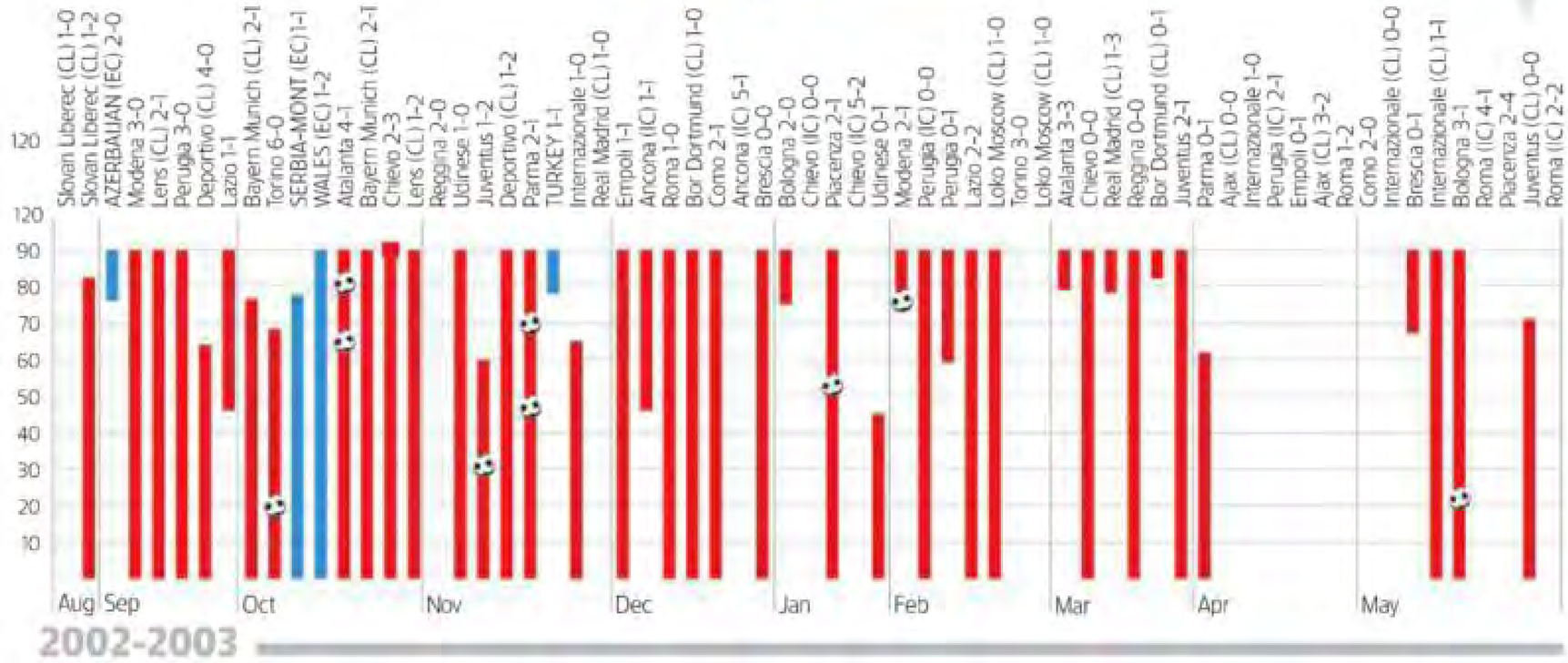
List of priorities

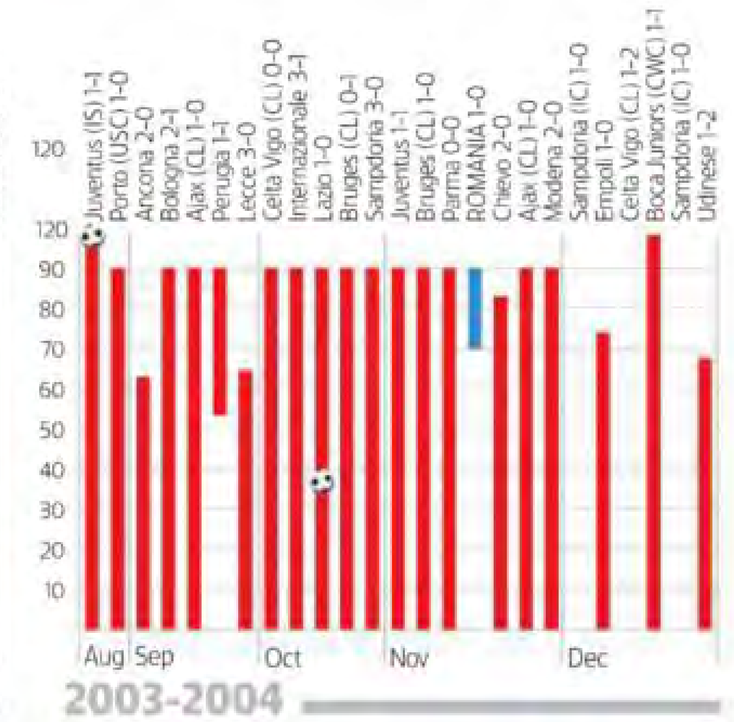
Back in the days when reporters would descend upon Milan's Milanello training centre, Pirlo never featured high on their list of priorities. It was not that Pirlo was not an important player, it was rather everyone knew all too well that, in his seemingly taciturn, understated way, Pirlo would not make for exciting TV footage.

Not for nothing, Pirlo himself admits that one of the few comments made about him that he actually likes is one

Exalted company... with Ronaldo at Inter

May 28, 2003 – collects his first Champions League trophy as Milan beat Juventus on penalties after a 0-0 draw in the all-Italian Final in Manchester.





Kings of Europe...(left to right) Kaka, Massimo Ambrosini and Pirlo after Milan's 2007 Champions League Final victory

was a significant one in that it saw Marcello Lippi's side consolidate their hold on European qualifying Group 5, smoothing the path through to the Germany 2006 finals next summer. When and if Italy get there, too, it is all too probable that no player, Totti, Buffon, Nesta and Zambrotta included, will be more crucial to the Italian cause than Pirlo."

The rest, of course, is history. If, until then, not all football fans worldwide had registered the low-profile Pirlo, he was hard to ignore in Germany. Man of the match in Italy's opening win against Ghana, their semi-final against Germany and in the victorious Final against France, Pirlo was one of the key elements in that World Cup triumph.

The game against Scotland the previous year had served to convince Lippi that he could build his midfield around the creative skills of Pirlo. Yet the remarkable thing about Pirlo is that, although prodigiously talented, it took him some time to establish his ideal position.

Even before he made his Serie A debut in May 1995 for Brescia, in a 2-0 away defeat by Reggiana just two days after his 16th birthday, the news about Pirlo was already out. This boy had two great feet and could put the ball wherever he wanted, but he was of average height and not very fast. However, such was his reputation that, in November 1995, Inter invited him to play in a training game just to get a good look at him.

Inter clearly liked the look of what they saw, but it took them three years to buy him from Brescia. In hindsight, Pirlo's move in the summer of 1998 could not have come at a worse moment. That first

Back to earth...Pirlo comes off worst in a clash with Luis Helguera of Udinese during his loan spell at Brescia

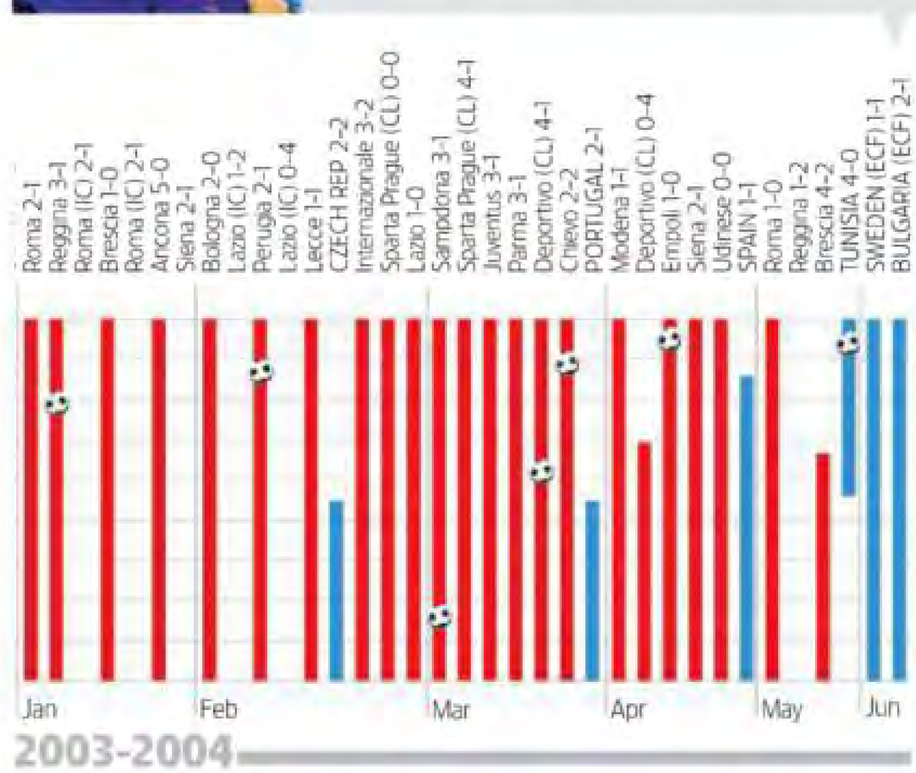
> "Pirlo is a silent leader on the pitch. His feet do the talking for him"
>
> Marcello Lippi, Italy's World Cup-winning coach

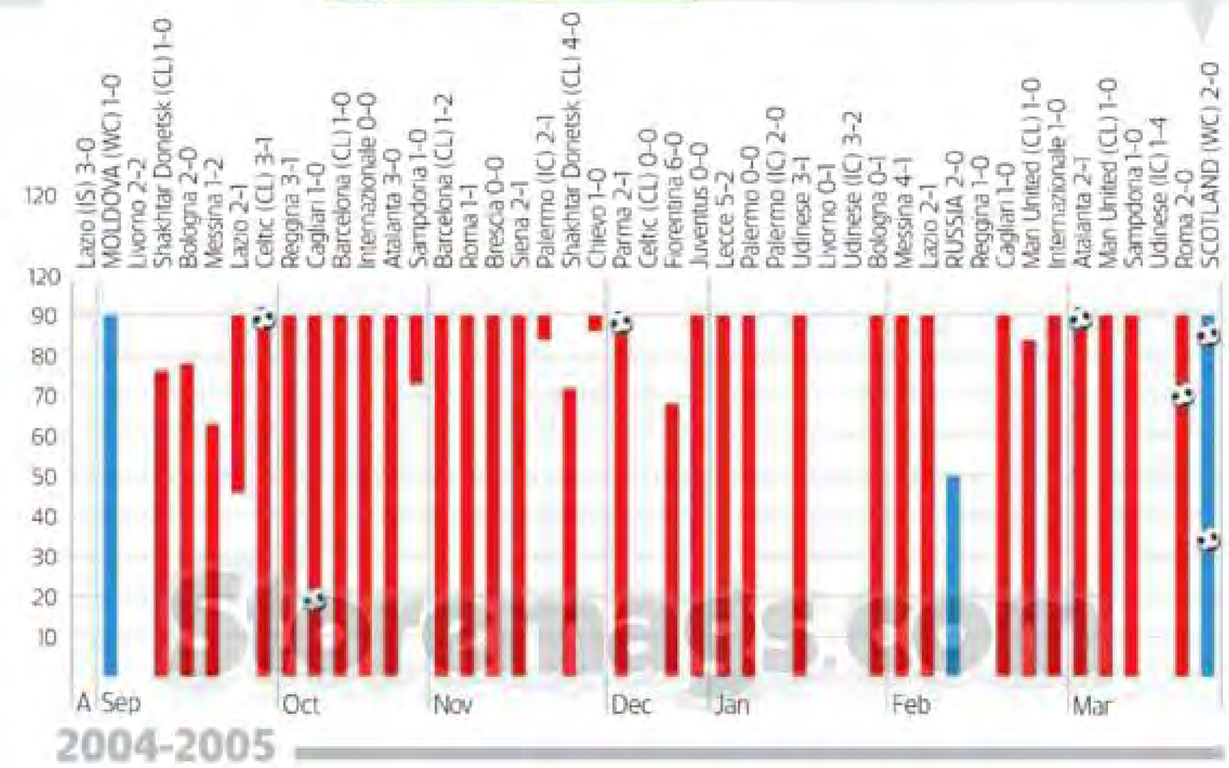
from seven years ago by his World Cup-winning Italy coach, Marcello Lippi, who told *La Repubblica*: "Pirlo is a silent leader on the pitch. His feet do the talking for him."

Lippi made that comment immediately after a 2-0 World Cup qualifying win over Scotland at the San Siro in March 2005, in which both Italy goals had come from hallmark Pirlo free-kicks. Analysing that particular performance, *World Soccer* concluded: "Italy's victory over Scotland may have been an all too predictable result, but it

June 22, 2004 – Pirlo and Christian Vieri (right) are dejected as Italy crash out of Euro 2004 in Portugal despite winning their last group match against Bulgaria.

Mar 26, 2005 – scores both goals, his only brace for his country, as Italy beat Scotland in a World Cup qualifier.





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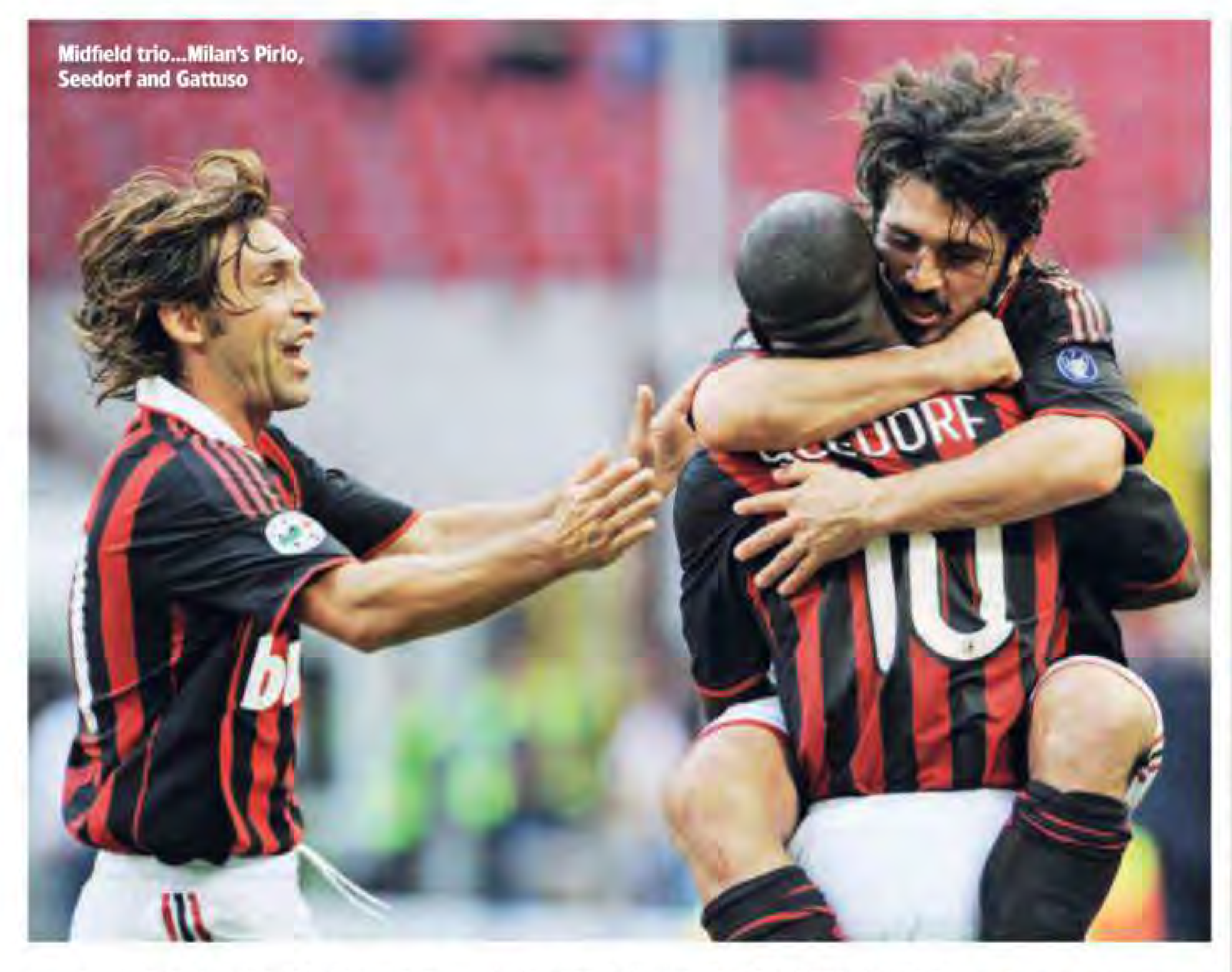
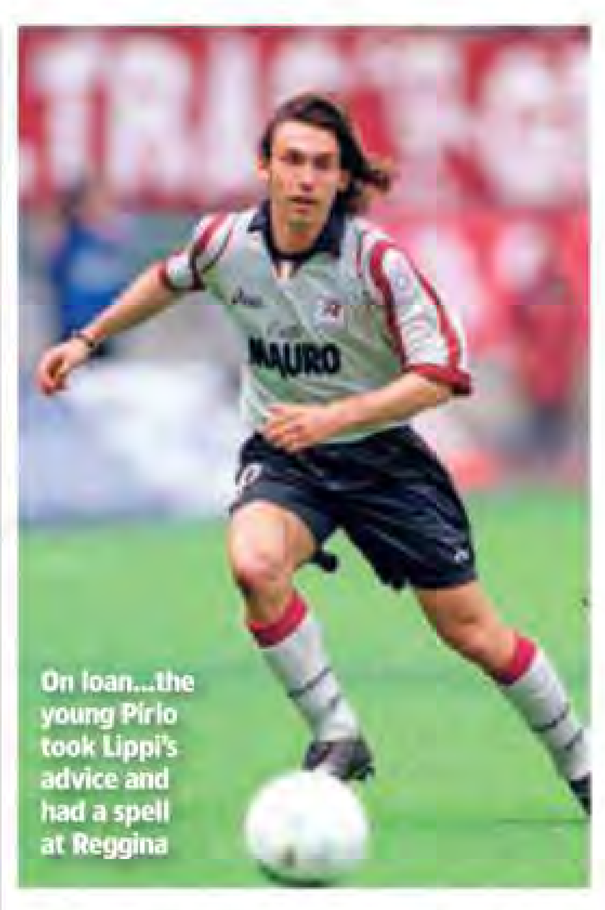
KEY Brescia · Internazionale · Reggina · Milan · Juventus · Italy



Midfield trio...Milan's Pirlo, Seedorf and Gattuso



On loan...the young Pirlo took Lippi's advice and had a spell at Reggina

season at Inter was the infamous year when four coaches came and went in quick fashion: first Gigi Simoni, then Romania's Mircea Lucescu, then reserve coach Luciano Castellini, and finally Roy Hodgson. To round matters off, by the beginning of the following season, there was a fifth man in charge, with Lippi drafted in to replace Hodgson.

In the chaos of the first season, Pirlo got a little lost, making just 18 first-team appearances. In the second season, it got worse since Lippi could see no role for him and advised him to accept a loan move to Reggina, where he had an excellent campaign. Back at base for the 2000-01 season, with Marco Tardelli now in charge, he was again loaned out, this time to his old club Brescia. The loan was made even though Tardelli knew him well, having coached the Italy side which, much inspired by Pirlo, had just won the 2000 European Under-21 Championship.

The move, though, turned out to be a lucky break for Pirlo. Brescia's coach in those days was Carlo Mazzone. He already had Roberto Baggio in his team so he needed to find another position for Pirlo. In a March 2001 Serie A game at home to Lazio, he played him as a central defensive midfielder, right in front of the defence but with the mandate to make the play from that deep-lying position.

Even if this might have been the

Early reward...a European Under-21 Championship winner in 2000

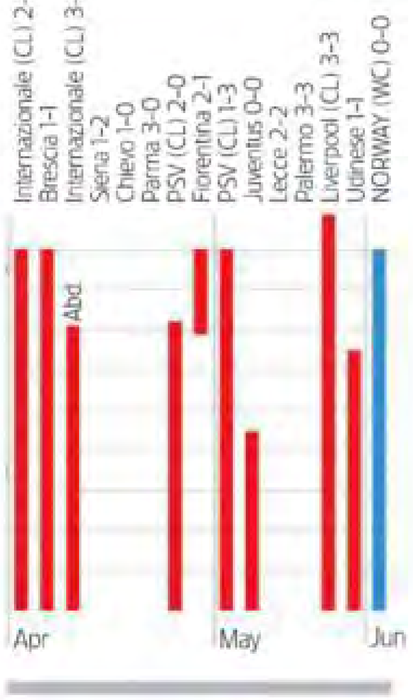
beginning of what Brazilian coach Carlos Parreira memorably defined as Pirlo's "Zico-in-front-of-the-defence" role, Inter were not convinced. At the end of the season, and for reasons best known to themselves, Inter opted to trade Pirlo for Milan's Argentinian midfielder Andreas Guglielminpietro.

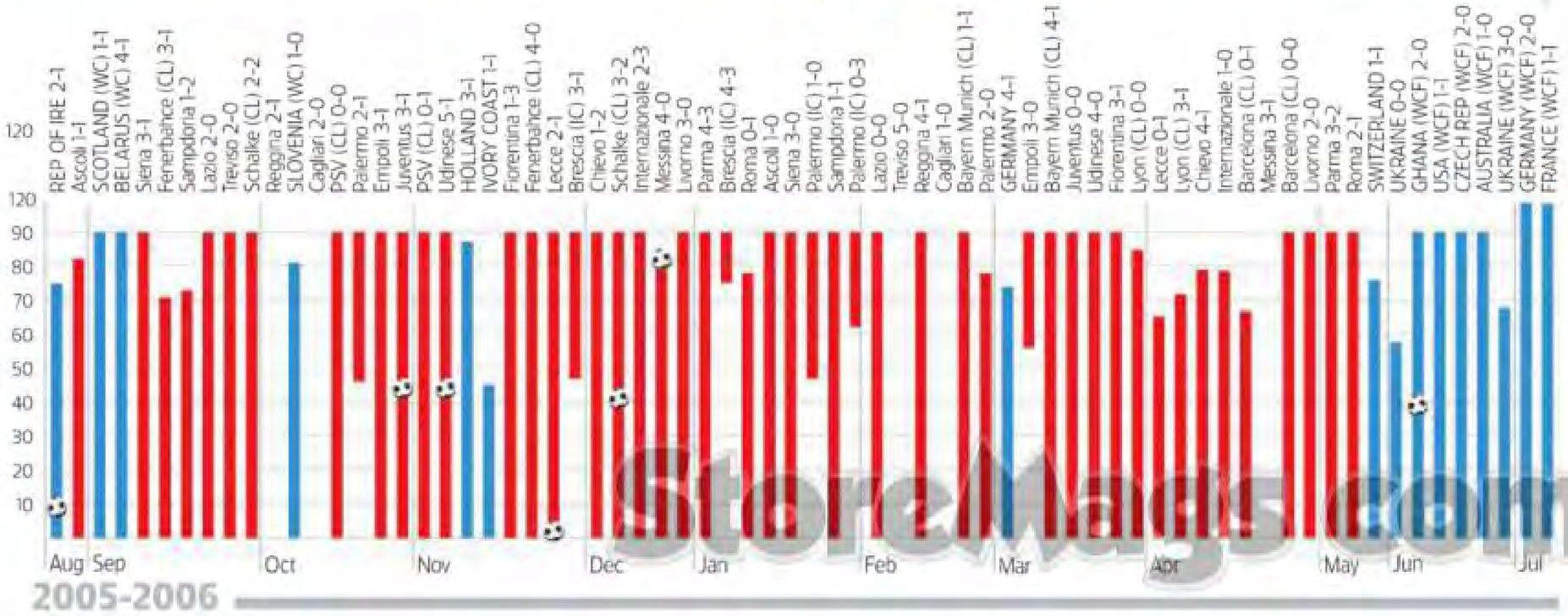
When he got to Milan, Pirlo soon realised that with players such as Portugal's Rui Costa, Brazil's Rivaldo and Clarence Seedorf of Holland around, there was already a glut of talented, attacking midfielders. During pre-season training, coach Carlo Ancelotti was struggling with the same conundrum when Pirlo himself came up with a solution. Why not try out the Brescia tactical solution, used so successfully alongside Baggio? Namely, drop him deep in midfield, in front of the defence but still with the playmaking brief.

It worked better than Ancelotti had ever imagined. The positional switch allowed Ancelotti to play Pirlo deep, with

May 25, 2005 – a rare penalty miss as Milan lose to Liverpool on penalties in the Champions League Final after being 3-0 up at half-time.

July 9, 2006 – kissing the World Cup following Italy's penalty shoot-out victory in the Final against France in Berlin.





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Seedorf on the right and Gennaro Gattuso on the left, and with Rui Costa or Rivaldo playing behind the front men. Not surprisingly, the Seedorf-Pirlo-Gattuso trio remained a quintessential element in winning Milan sides over the next decade.

Until then, Pirlo had often been labelled a "luxury item", a playmaker to be discarded when his side was in trouble. Never again. Years later, looking back on his initial difficulties, Pirlo could afford to be philosophical, telling *La Stampa* last summer: "They can play me wherever they like but I feel that I am a No10, the man who controls all the traffic, even if I have never actually worn that shirt. I started with the 21 at Brescia and I have stuck with that."

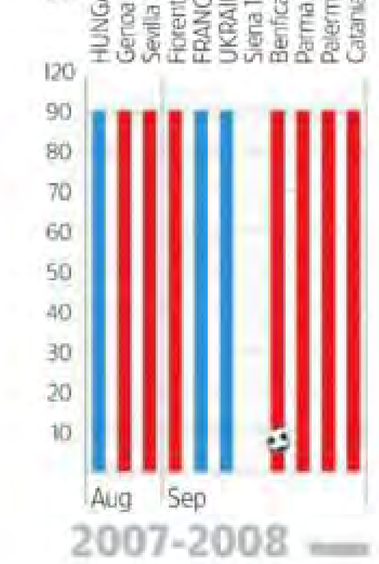
Curiously, in his now long-established role, Pirlo tends be a vital "stopper" for his team. As central defensive players go, he is not your average big hulking brute, but this does not make him any less effective for reasons he himself once explained, saying: "To be useful in defence, to win back the ball, you don't always have to go sliding into the tackle. It's also about your positioning. Sometimes all you have to do is take a step back."

The most obvious aspect of the Pirlo role, though, is that it allows him to dictate the tempo both of his own side and of the game. "The secret for someone in my position is to keep it

> "I don't like interviews or going on TV, I don't have a Facebook page, I don't chat on Twitter" Andrea Pirlo

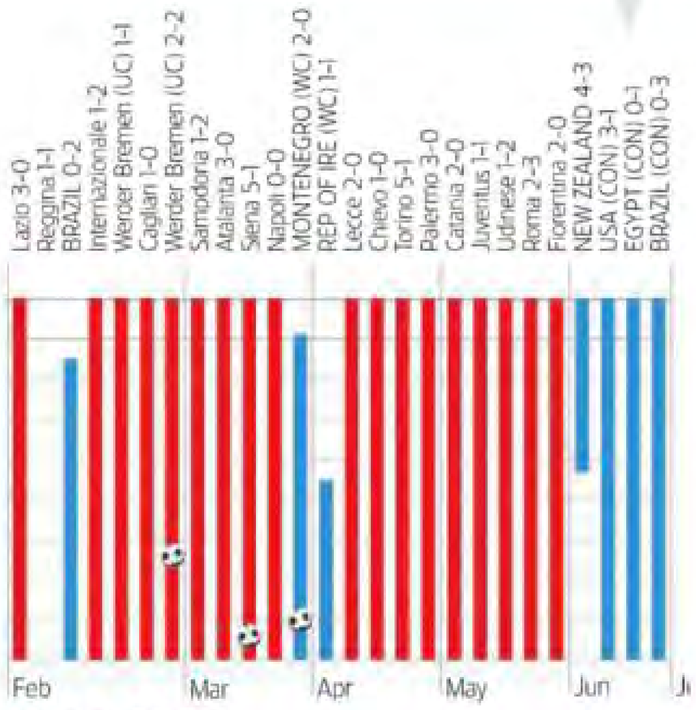
World Cup woe...Pirlo was restricted to just 34 minutes of action in South Africa

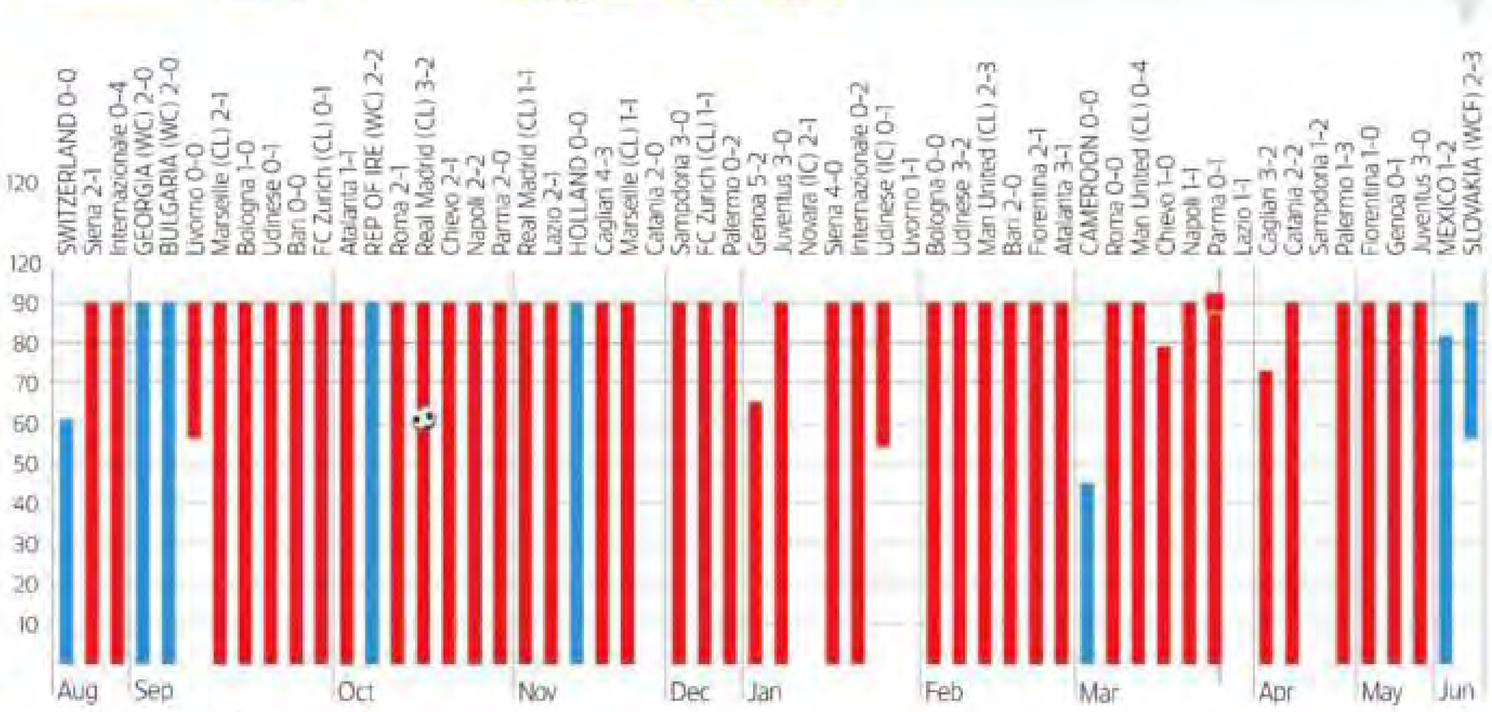
May 23, 2007 – Pirlo inspires Milan to a 2-1 win in the Champions League Final against Liverpool, their conquerors of two years before.



Jun 18, 2009 – a big shock, one year before Italy defend their World Cup, as they lose 1-0 to Egypt in the Confederations Cup in South Africa.

Jun 24, 2010 – Italy's defence of the World Cup ends as they fail to get out of their group. Pirlo, plays only 34 minutes as a sub against Slovakia.





KEY Brescia Internazionale Reggina Milan Juventus Italy

simple," he says. "Keep possession and keep the ball moving quickly so that you tire out your opponents. That's my method."

Little wonder that when Lippi was asked by *Gazzetta dello Sport* about this season's Juve, he spoke enthusiastically about the excellent transfer market campaign conducted by the club last summer. "Pirlo, of course, was the outstanding purchase," he said. "I have been talking to the Juventus defenders and they tell me that, by comparison with the last few seasons, they feel a lot more comfortable knowing that they have a reference point in midfield, someone they can give the ball to, certain that he will do something good with it even if he has got three guys on top of him."

Lippi, of course, has reason to ruefully reflect on just how much an injury to Pirlo cost him and Italy at the 2010 World Cup. In the end, Pirlo played only 34 minutes in South Africa, appearing as a substitute in the second half of Italy's final first-round game, that infamous defeat by Slovakia. Italy had many problems in South Africa but the loss of Pirlo was certainly one of the biggest.

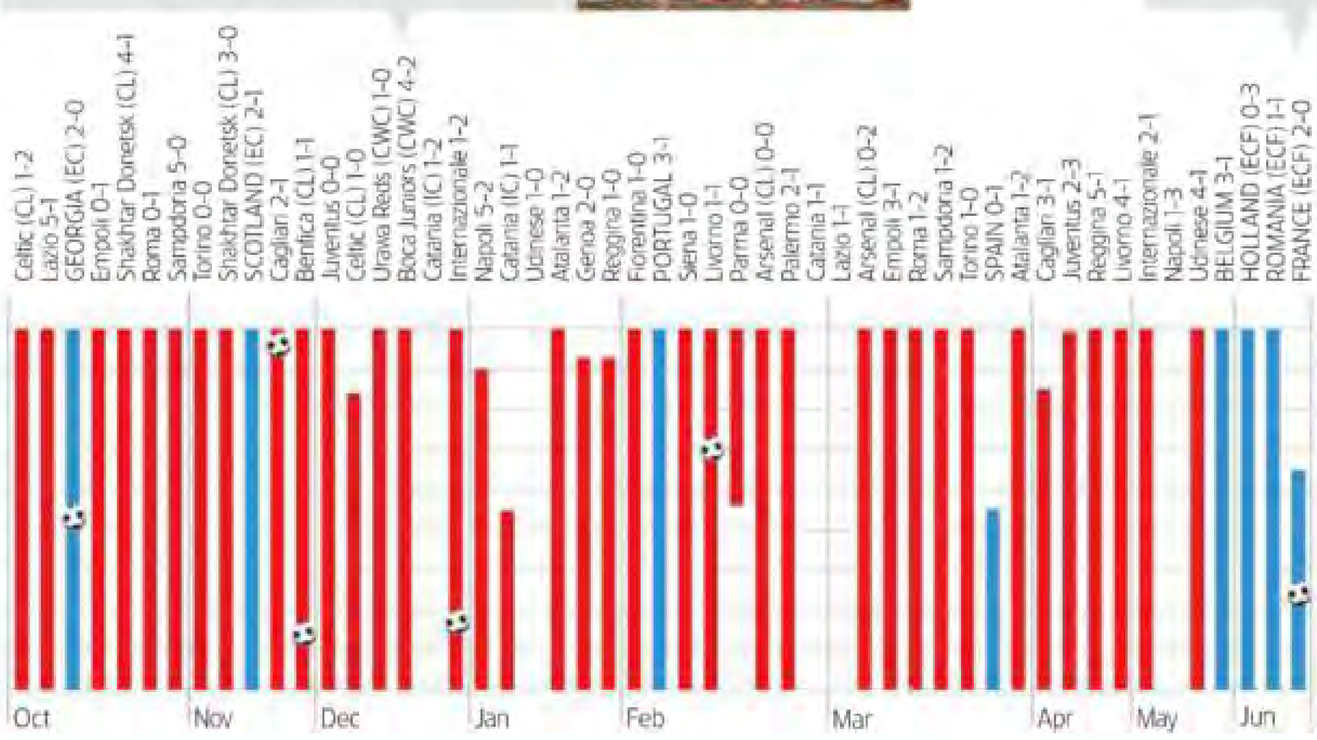
As for his surprise move to Juventus, Pirlo himself has said more than once that it was his own decision, not that of Milan. After a decade at Milan and after a poor, injury-interrupted season, the time to change had come. Motivation was in short supply. A move to an ambitious, hungry Juve, keen to climb back on top might be just the thing.

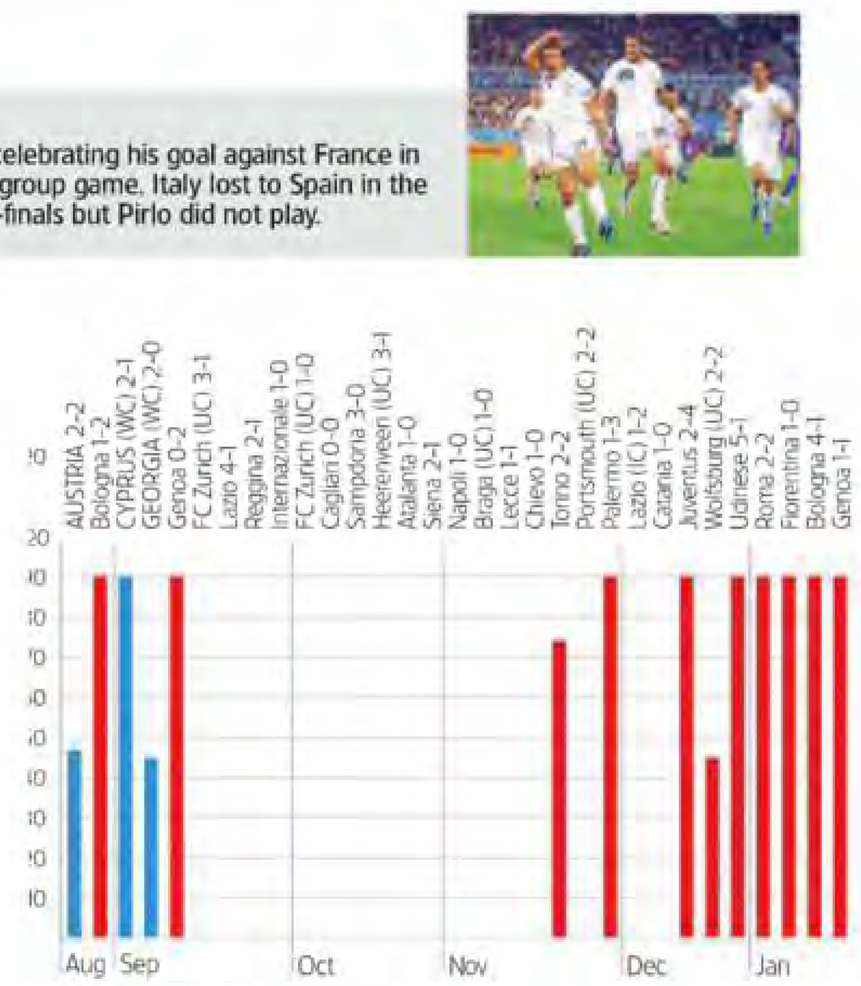
So far, this looks like a marriage made in heaven. **WS**

Turning heads in Turin... Pirlo applauds the fans after Juve's Serie A game with Cagliari

Dec 16, 2007 – Milan defeat Boca Juniors from Argentina to win the Club World Cup in Yokohama, Japan.

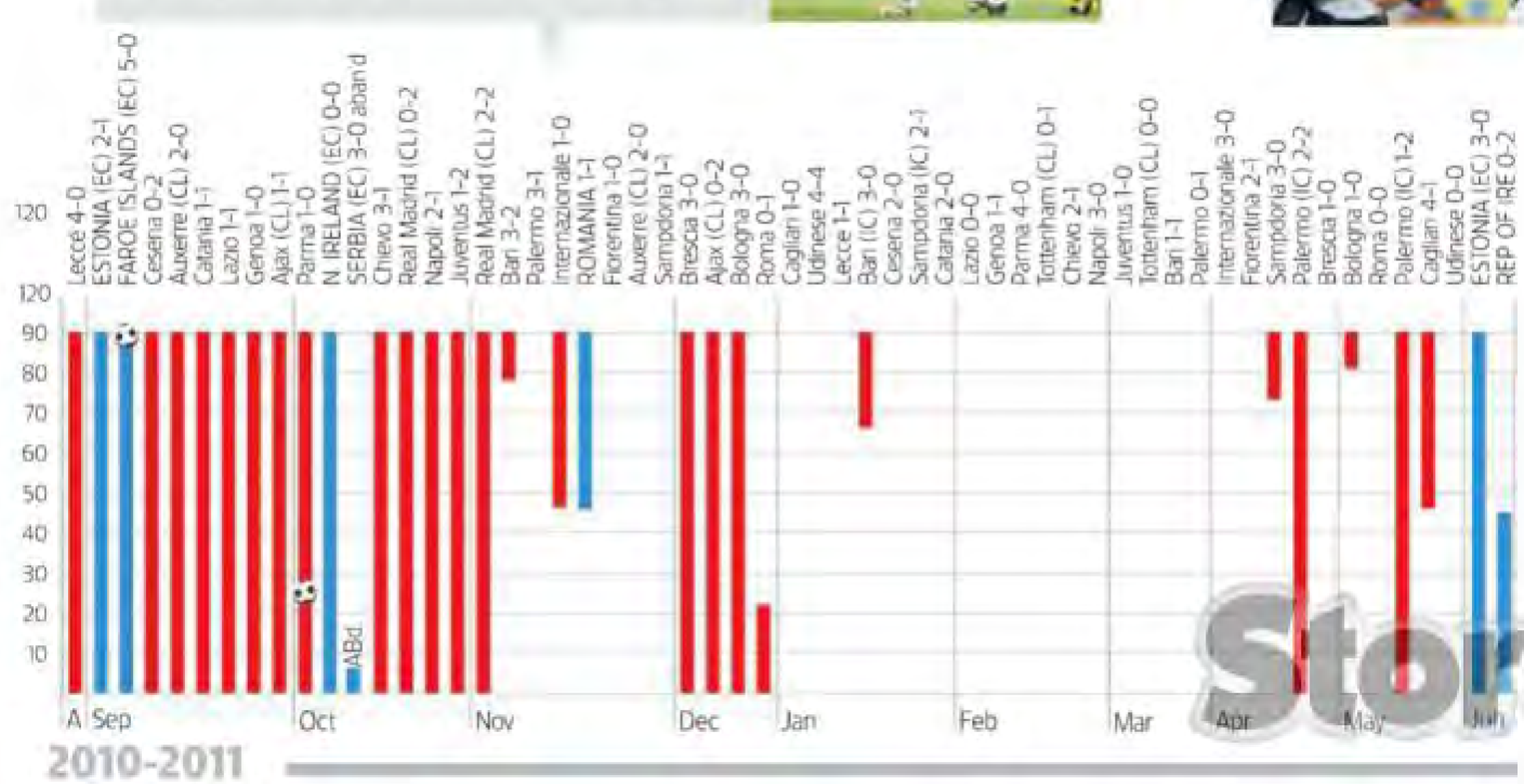
Jun 17, 2008 – celebrating his goal against France in their Euro 2008 group game. Italy lost to Spain in the quarter-finals but Pirlo did not play.

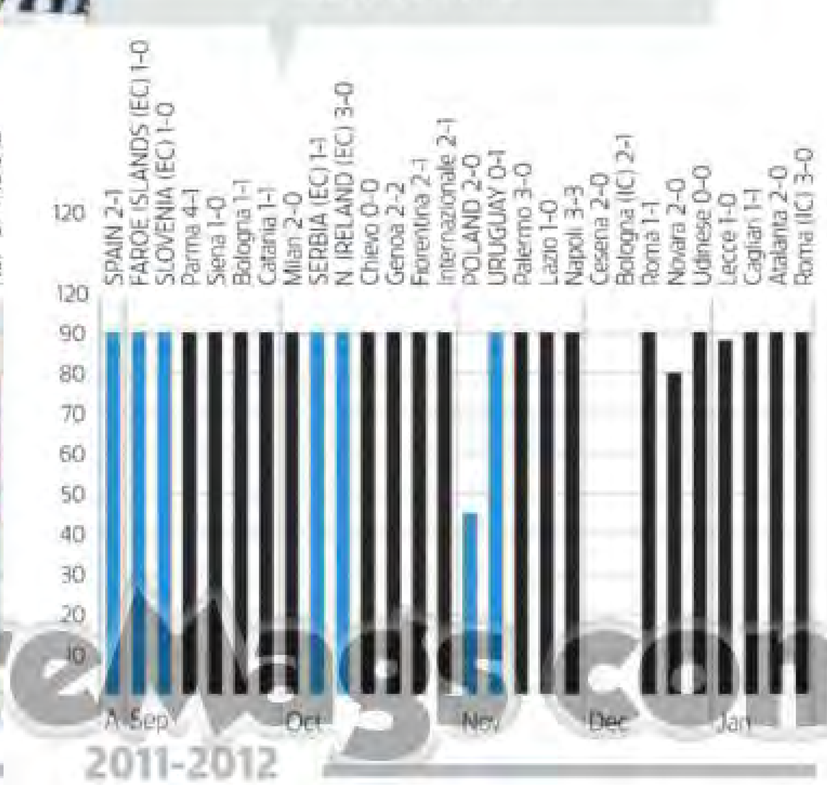




Nov 14, 2010 – helps Milan win 1-0 in the last of his 18 Milanese derbies. He would appear in only 10 more games for the *Rossoneri* before joining Juve.

Oct 2, 2011 – celebrating with Juventus coach Conte after his new club defeat Milan 2-0 at home.





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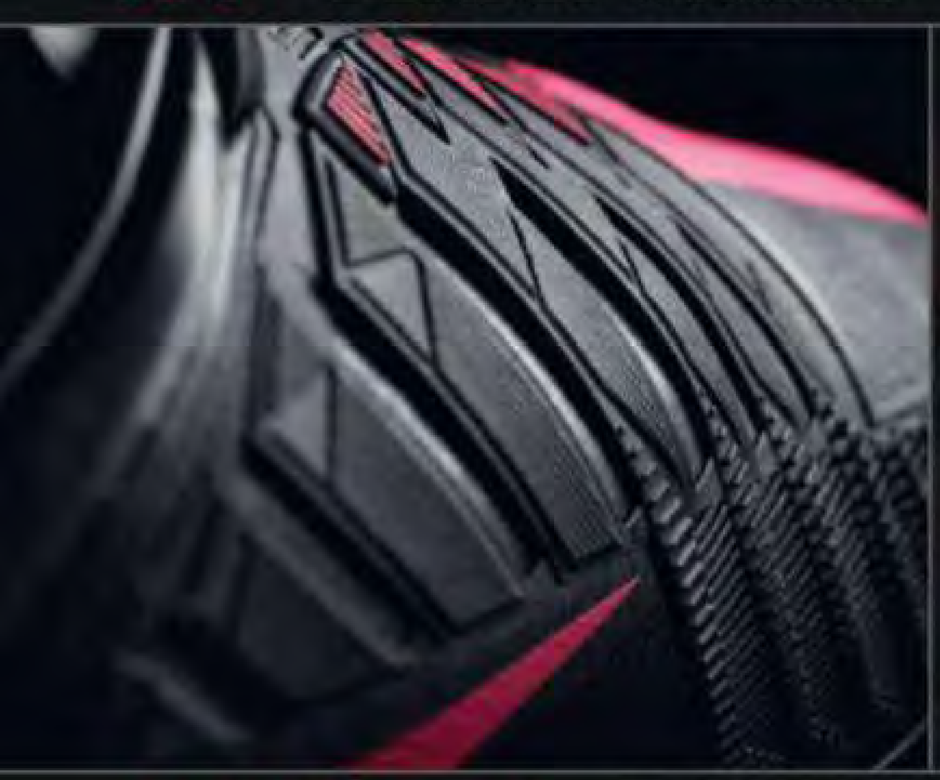

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ClubFocus

MANCHESTER CITY

Blue moon rising

Alex Ferguson called them "the noisy neighbours" but United's rivals will not be distracted in their bid to become one of Europe's elite. **Jim Holden** reports

Of all the challenges from new money to the old order of European football – by Paris Saint-Germain, Shakhtar Donetsk, Malaga, and even Chelsea – the most powerful is being lodged by Manchester City. Their owners, led by Sheikh Mansour from the royal family of oil state Abu Dhabi, have virtually unlimited wealth.

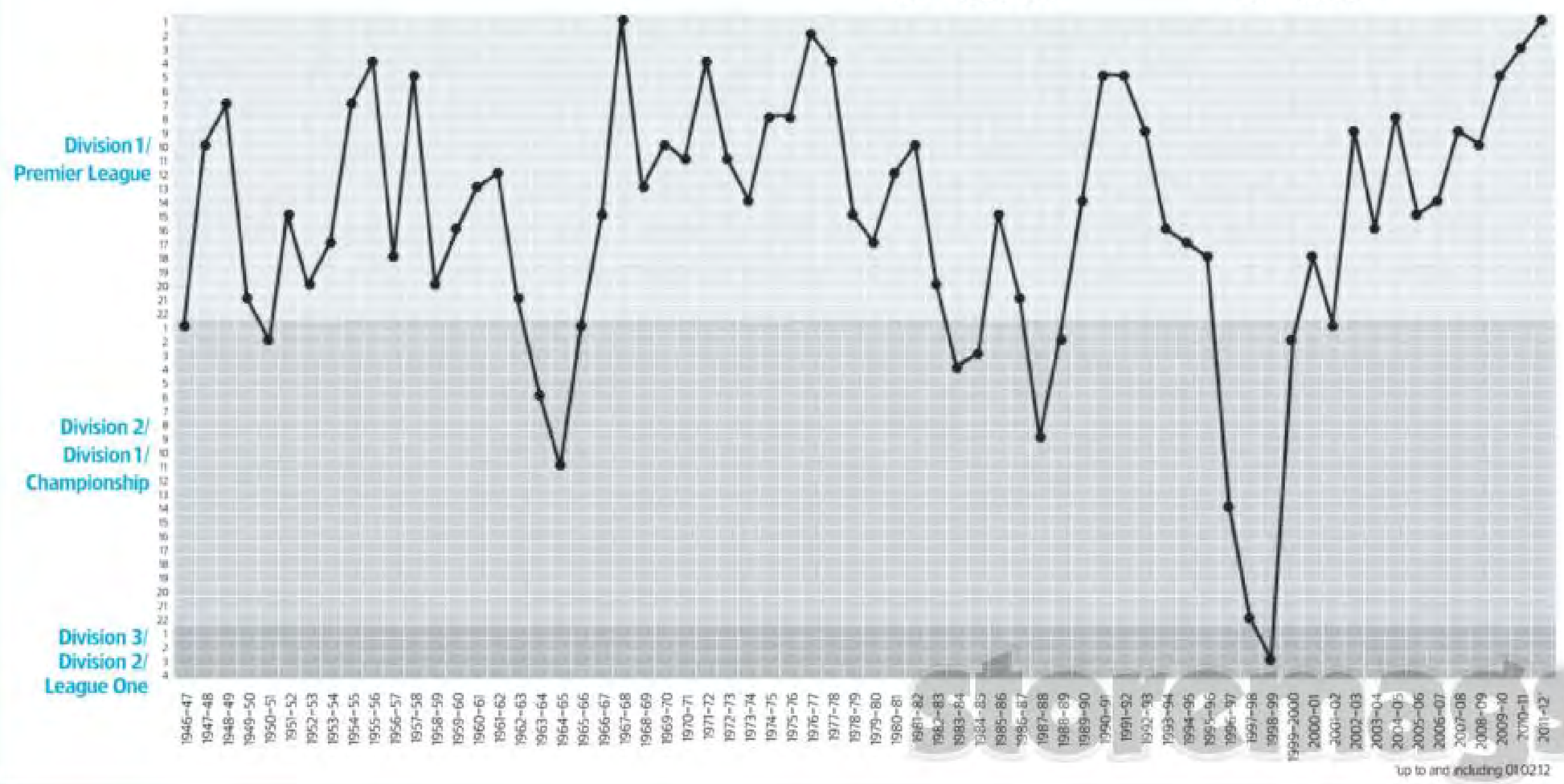
They have a clear long-term vision, they have introduced stable and strong management, and they are trusting in a ruthless, cold-eyed first-team boss. And

Money well spent... (from left) Barry, Aguero and Dzeko celebrate another City goal

MANCHESTER CITY'S LEAGUE POSITIONS 1947-2012

CUP SUCCESSES 1947-2012

1956	FA Cup
1968	Charity Shield
1969	FA Cup
1970	League Cup
1970	European Cup-winners Cup
1972	Charity Shield
1976	League Cup
2011	FA Cup



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The future...how City's new training complex will look (with the stadium in the background)

Changing times...former City and England winger Summerbee now has an ambassadorial role with the club

Prize asset...Silva

> "When you have genuine owners who really do want to invest, why penalise them?"
> Brian Marwood, Chief of Football Operations

they have also begun to assert serious and stylish authority in the Premier League this season with a 6-1 win away to arch-rivals Manchester United, a 5-1 victory away to Tottenham Hotspur, and a record number of goals scored in the first half of the season.

Yet, there is a curious conundrum at work with City. Despite everything, they still feel like victims.

Why? Well, the Financial Fairplay (FFP) rules being introduced by UEFA in an attempt to curb the excesses of clubs who wildly overspend and plunge into monstrous debt have the potential to strike City hardest of all, preventing them from entering the Champions League and earning its reward of self-perpetuating revenue generation.

Biggest loss

City posted the biggest annual loss in the history of football at £197million in the last financial year – the consequence of a transfer splurge and a wage bill of £174m, a figure £21m higher than the club's turnover. They spent money they had not earned, yet nor had they borrowed. The club has solid funding from the largesse of ambitious owners, but under FFP rules that is deemed wrong.

Of course, Manchester City believe this is deeply unfair and they have a natural alliance with newly rich clubs like PSG in feeling cruelly disadvantaged, certainly in comparison to the old football money and status of Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United.

The City perspective is delivered with eloquence by Brian Marwood, their Chief of Football Operations. He won England caps with Arsenal and Sheffield Wednesday and is that rare breed in English football: a player turned club administrator – a transition he made after working for 11 years in the commercial world with Nike.

"Yes, I think we should be given more time to adjust to the demands of Financial Fairplay," says Marwood. "I really think so. Why should somebody be penalised for wanting to be successful? Why should a football club like us or Paris Saint-Germain or Malaga, who have new owners, be held back?

"PSG are a great club that have been in the wilderness for a few years. They have big football people like Leonardo and Carlo Ancelotti, a great stadium, but could be in a really difficult place because of the rules people are trying to impose.

"I can understand the desire to protect football clubs because of the

THE POWER CURVE

The key figures behind Manchester City

SHEIKH MANSOUR

The 100 per cent owner of Manchester City is a member of the ruling family of the Abu Dhabi emirate in the Gulf. His oil wealth is estimated at £20billion and his political influence is such that he has Barack Obama on speed dial.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK

An Emirati businessman, educated in the USA, who has worked in the oil and banking industries. He is the hands-on chairman of City and was also heavily involved in taking the Club World Cup to Abu Dhabi.

ROBERTO MANCINI

Italian manager who won three Serie A titles with Internazionale, after working at Fiorentina and Lazio. Joined City two years ago and led them to FA Cup success last season.

BRIAN MARWOOD

Former player at Arsenal who joined City from sportswear firm Nike as Chief of Football Operations. He is responsible for overseeing the club's football development.

VINCENT KOMPANY

First-team captain, the defender has been outstanding on the field and also in forging a strong team spirit after the trauma of the Carlos Tevez affair.

SITUATION VACANT

There is a vacuum to be filled after Garry Cook quit following a series of controversies. Acting CEO John MacBeath (above) is unlikely to take the role long term.

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Past glories...City players toast their 1968 title triumph

Doing the Poznan... City supporters give their take on the goal celebrations of the Polish club's fans by turning their backs on the play

horrific stories some owners have created by decimating clubs. Football does have a duty of protection in this area. But when you have genuine owners who really do want to invest, why penalise them? The fact is we can cope with our spending.

"If you try to tell somebody in London's West End theatre industry that they couldn't pay an actor £50,000 a week for the top show in town you wouldn't get away with that. You should be allowed to pay whatever you want for that actor because people want to watch that actor. What we're trying to do is assemble a team of great players that people want to watch. But then they are saying to us: 'You can't pay the going rate.'

"Well, if Manchester City don't pay the going rate on wages for a player, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United may pay it. They can do so because they have 75,000 attendances. What we are trying to do is create a similar environment and we are working with UEFA to show it can be done.

"One of the things we have to show is a more sensible balance between income and expenditure. We fully believe that last year, when we posted record losses, it was the bottom of the curve. We are confident now that the way revenues are being generated, the situation will change. You are never going to generate revenues if a team is not successful. It's a vicious circle, to a degree. You have to spend money to get a return on that investment.

"Clubs like Bayern Munich are in a great place because they have built what they have over a long number of years. Manchester United have done something similar. Now, all of a sudden, in the space of a couple of years, Manchester City and everybody else have to try to get their act together and compete against United, Bayern or Real Madrid."

Everyone will have a view on City's situation, but the club surely has a valid point when emphasising the long-term vision of its strategy. While the immediate focus is on football – a challenge for the Premier League crown and a narrow failure to progress from a tough group in the Champions League – there is much evidence of good work behind the scenes: the building of a new academy, the creation of strong internal systems, a serious scouting overhaul and the revitalisation of the Manchester City name.

The academy plans, based in part on the famous La Masia model of Barcelona, are undeniably impressive – the facilities, the links with St Bede's College school, the desire to educate youngsters in football and life, the ambition to develop their own players and in future to rely far less on transfer spending.

The short-term cost is substantial but the goal is sustainable success.

Long-term planning

The appointment and work of Marwood is also evidence of long-term planning. He is effectively a European-style director of football, bringing stability to the club, and he cites the handling of the trauma of the Carlos Tevez affair this season as one major benefit. When former captain and talisman Tevez allegedly refused to warm-up as a substitute in a Champions League match in Munich the risk of team destabilisation was enormous. Instead, manager Roberto Mancini stood strong and the club backed him.

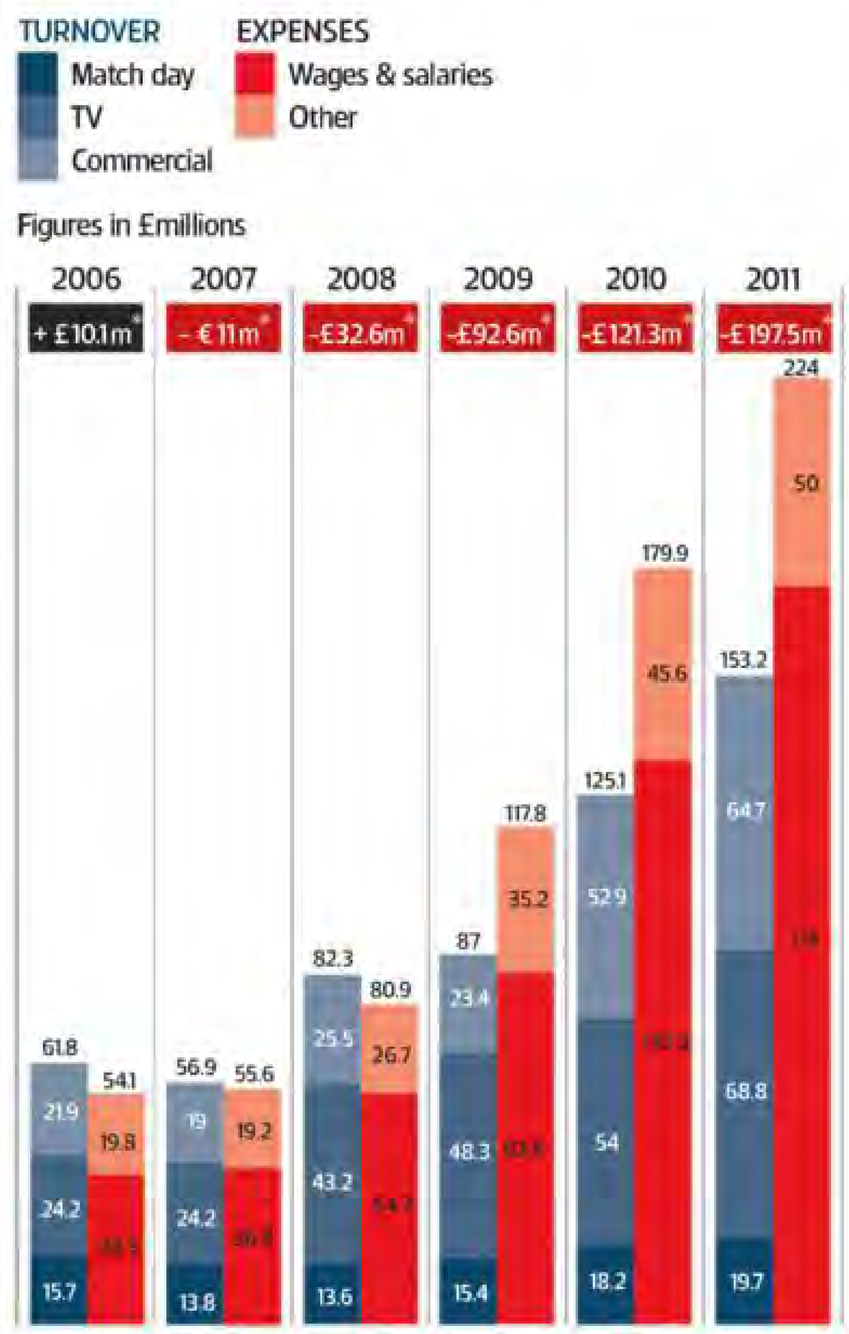
"Structure helps," explains Marwood. "It is a great shame what happened with Carlos. Until recently he had been incredible for the club, our top scorer for two seasons and our captain. The great thing about having a strong structure is that once you do have an issue you can take that out and things can move on.

"If it had happened two or three years ago it would have been a huge problem for the club. Now, we have dealt really well with it, internally and externally. I can take away a lot of stuff like that and allow Roberto to manage the first team."

The club's scouting system has been transformed too, now rivalling the best. A key figure here behind the scenes has been former Norwich City player Rob Newman, their Spanish scout who played a vital role in the acquisition of David Silva and Spain starlet Denis Suarez, an 18-year-old midfielder already on the fringe of the first team.

"We beat off Real and Barca to get the kid," says Newman. "It was a tough and important battle to win, a sign of

PROFIT AND LOSS



* After player amortisation, stadium costs & exceptional items

STRUGGLING TO MEET UEFA'S NEW RULES

Revenue has risen considerably in the last three years, but the increase in City's spending has been even greater, with a record loss of £197m last year. The club say losses peaked last year and that they will fall over the coming years, helped by a huge sponsorship deal with Etihad, a company with close links to the club's owners. But City are still a considerable way off meeting UEFA's Financial Fairplay regulations, which allow for annual losses of only £12.5m.

the club's progress."

An underestimated part of the Abu Dhabi revolution at City is the regeneration of the club's spirit. Success on the field is vital, of course, but there has been a big emphasis on community work and also re-engaging with club legends such as Mike Summerbee, who inspired the club's last league championship success long ago in 1968. The old winger has been made the club's official ambassador, an active rather than honorary role.

It is a far cry from a few years back when the only way Summerbee could watch "his team" was by joining the groundsman on his bench at the side of the pitch.

Long dominance

If it is City's new money that makes Europe fearful, it is Manchester United's long dominance in their backyard that is the second great challenge for City. It is nothing like PSG who have a clear run in Paris.

Mancini understands this clearly and already has one hugely significant success in gaining the respect of United's veteran boss Alex Ferguson for his hard-line approach both in dealing with players and with creating a winning philosophy. On another side of the coin, Mancini admits to a certain envy of United's long-term strength when he says: "Every team that faces United is afraid. It takes 20 years to create that and it will take many more years of work here at City to get to where United are now.

"When I was at Inter it was the same situation. They had not won the league for 19 years and they found it hard to win three games in a row."

It explains why Mancini, despite some fierce media flak, was dedicated to defence in his first 18 months at the club before developing a more stylish side this season. Perhaps this best illustrates the steel in the Manchester City revolution, that long-term thinking trumps short-term issues and aggravation.

"There is a single-mindedness and a coldness about him that is impressive," says Marwood. "It's always a risk when you choose a new manager, whoever you appoint. But we liked Roberto. To start with there wasn't really exciting football but he needed to build a foundation and that was being difficult to beat.

"He started with the basics and then we were able to acquire more expressive players. We trusted in Roberto to get it right. You have to have faith in what he's doing. We won the FA Cup last season and now I think we have a style of football that people seem to enjoy. Roberto has done a fantastic job."

Certainly, there is a sense of a football club that will not be derailed by criticism and scorn, a club that will not be deterred by local or continental obstacles in pursuing its grand vision to become part of football's elite.

Barely a dozen years ago City were marooned in the third tier of English football. Now their *Blue Moon* anthem is being heard all over Europe. WS

THE SQUAD

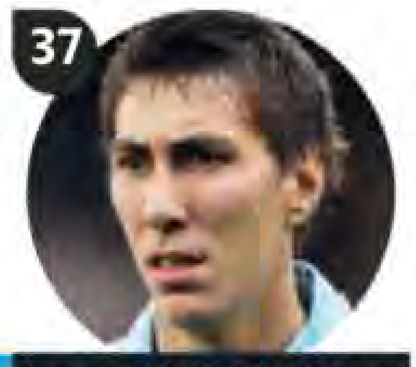
GOALKEEPERS

Joe HART

Age 24 (19.04.87)
England's first-choice and City's No 1 since the start of last season. Began his career at Shrewsbury Town, having been a promising cricketer as a boy.

Gunnar NIELSEN (Far)

Age 25 (01.10.86)
Made his only Premier League appearance in April 2010 as a substitute for the injured Shay Given in the 76th minute of City's 0-0 draw with Arsenal.



Costel PANTILIMON (Rom)

Age 25 (01.02.87)
Romanian international signed on a season-long loan from Poli Timisoara. Second-choice behind Hart, he is the tallest player in the Premier League at 6ft 8in.

DEFENDERS

Gael CLICHY (Fra)

Age 26 (16.07.85)
Quick, attack-minded left-back signed from Arsenal for £7m last summer. Plucked by Arsene Wenger from Cannes as a 17-year-old, he replaced Ashley Cole and was a member of the 2004-05 "Invincibles" side.

Aleksandar KOLAROV (Ser)

Age 26 (10.11.85)
Has alternated with Clichy in the left-back role, although he can also play centre-back. Has a powerful shot from free-kicks. Signed from Lazio in 2010.

Vincent KOMPANY (Blg)

Age 25 (10.04.86)
Club captain and centre-half who can also play in defensive midfield. Has been outstanding for City this season. A regular for Belgium since making his international debut aged 17. Joined from Hamburg for £6m in 2008.

MIDFIELDERS

Gareth BARRY

Age 30 (23.02.81)
England international who usually sits alongside De Jong in a holding role in City's 4-2-3-1 formation. Joined City from Aston Villa in 2009 for £16m despite having claimed a year earlier that he wanted to join Liverpool in order to play Champions League football.

Nigel DE JONG (Hol)

Age 27 (30.11.84)
Holland international who has earned a reputation for fearsome tackles, including an X-rated challenge on Xabi Alonso in the 2010 World Cup Final. A product of the Ajax academy.

Adam JOHNSON

Age 24 (14.07.87)
England winger signed from Middlesbrough in January 2010 as City looked to boost the number of English players in their ranks.

FORWARDS

Sergio AGUERO (Arg)

Age 23 (02.06.88)
Has added a new dimension to City's game since joining from Atletico Madrid for £35m last summer. Marriage to Diego Maradona's daughter Giannina makes him Argentinian football royalty.

Mario BALOTELLI (Ita)

Age 21 (12.09.800)
Maverick whose off-pitch escapades have already become part of Manchester folklore. Born in Sicily to Ghanaian immigrants but raised by an Italian family. Frequently frustrates Mancini, who was his coach at Inter.

Edin DZEKO (Bos)

Age 25 (17.03.86)
Bosnia international who is starting to show glimpses of the form he displayed when winning the Bundesliga title with Wolfsburg in 2009.

Stepmags.com

Home kit

Second kit

Third kit

THE COACH

Roberto MANCINI (Ita)
Age 47 (27.11.64)
Former Italy international who won 36 caps for his country and the Serie A title with Sampdoria and Lazio. He has enjoyed success with all the clubs he has managed, winning the Italian Cup with Fiorentina (2001) and Lazio (2004) before moving to Internazionale, who he guided to a hat-trick of league crowns, establishing them as the country's dominant side after years of inconsistency. However, he failed to achieve success in the Champions League and left in summer 2008. Appointed City boss in December 2009.

Joleon LESCOTT
Age 29 (16.08.82)
Centre-back and occasional England international who joined from Everton for £22m in 2009. Visible facial scar is the result of a serious car accident at the age of five.

Micah RICHARDS
Age 23 (24.06.88)
Powerful right-back who has also played in central defence. Raised in Leeds but came through the City youth ranks and is touted as a role model for City's ambitious academy plans. Overlooked by England manager Fabio Capello of late, despite strong performances.

Stefan SAVIC (Mne)
Age 21 (08.01.91)
Central defender signed from Partizan Belgrade for £6m last summer but has so far struggled to adapt to the pace of English football. Played a key role for Montenegro in the Euro 2012 qualifiers.

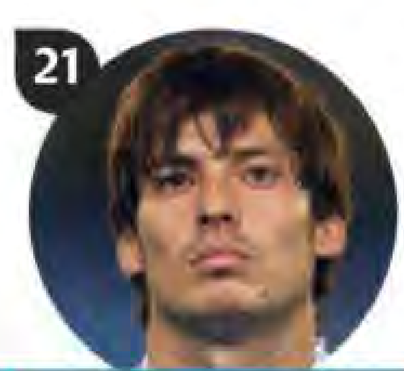
Kolo TOURE (IvC)
Age 30 (19.03.81)
Centre-back who served a six-month ban last year following a positive drugs test which he blamed on slimming pills. Joined from Arsenal for £16m in 2009. Elder brother of Yaya and a product of the ASEC academy in Abidjan.

Pablo ZABALETA (Arg)
Age 27 (16.01.85)
Versatile defender who has recently established himself as his country's first-choice right-back. Signed from Espanyol in 2008.

James MILNER
Age 26 (04.01.86)
Combative and versatile England international who has filled a number of different roles since joining from Aston Villa for £24m in 2010.

Samir NASRI (Fra)
Age 24 (16.06.87)
Technically gifted France international who has not shone at City in quite the way he did at Arsenal last season. City paid £25m to sign him last summer.

David PIZARRO (Chl)
Age 32 (11.09.79)
Joined on loan from Roma in the January transfer window. Brought in for his experience, he won the Serie A title with Internazionale in 2006 and was a bronze medal winner at the 2000 Olympics with Chile.



David SILVA (Spa)
Age 26 (08.01.86)
World Cup winner who has been outstanding since joining from Valencia in the summer of 2010. Winger, second striker, playmaker – wherever he plays he has a big influence on games.

Yaya TOURE (IvC)
Age 28 (13.05.83)
Much-travelled – having played in Belgium, Ukraine, Greece, France and Spain – he has arguably been City's most important player this season. Deployed by Mancini in a more attacking role than at his previous clubs.

ETIHAD STADIUM (capacity 47,800)

Originally the proposed main athletics arena in Manchester's failed bid to host the Summer Olympics in 2000, the arena's 80,000 capacity was cut when it staged the Commonwealth Games in 2002 and it is now the fifth-largest ground in the Premier League. Still commonly referred to as Eastlands by many supporters – the name of the site on which the ground was built – the City of Manchester Stadium was renamed following a 10-year sponsorship deal with Etihad Airways in July 2011.

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DAVID LUIZ

"Criticism does not affect me because it is inevitable, especially when you are a defender"

The Brazilian may have had his critics since joining Chelsea in January 2011, but he remains convinced success is on its way

Was it a difficult decision to leave Benfica and sign for Chelsea last year?
I was lucky to enjoy four great years in Lisbon, but the chance to come to Chelsea and play in the Premier League was too good an opportunity to refuse. For me, it was another important stage in my career and my life. Life at Benfica was good and I won trophies there, but the call of Chelsea was simply irresistible. I joined Benfica from Vitoria in Brazil, which was a huge upheaval, leaving my home country and moving to a different continent. By comparison, moving from Portugal to join Chelsea in England was easy.

You have been in the Premier League for a year now. What are your impressions of English football?
It is incredibly tough to play in the Premier League. All around the world, modern players are becoming stronger and fitter, but it is even more intense in the Premier League. You have to be much quicker with your feet and your head in England compared to Portugal. But it is not just the physicality, it is also the quality of the players at the top clubs. Which other league can boast players like Fernando Torres, Wayne Rooney, Javier Hernandez and Didier Drogba? There are a lot of excellent guys around.

Both you and Chelsea have received criticism at times this season. How do you deal with such comments?
As a group we know we have to remain united and focused. Of course we are aware of some of what is said, but it is not unusual as a footballer to be criticised. As a team, we know what our targets are and it is our responsibility not to be distracted. Personally, criticism does not affect me because it is inevitable, especially when you are a defender. I do not have any bad feelings towards those who say negative things, I just try to work even harder.

Has the media reaction to Chelsea's manager, Andre Villas-Boas, affected the squad?
It makes no difference to the players because we trust and support the manager. What happens on the pitch, on the training ground and in the dressing room is what really matters and not what people say or write.

You are certainly an adventurous defender. Are you really just a frustrated midfielder?
No, but I understand the question. When I was younger I played in midfield, but I am a defender and I relish my role. It should not be impossible for a defender to make an impact at the other end of the pitch, but, of course, the skill is knowing when to attack and when to defend.

Would you agree that it has been a frustrating season for Chelsea so far?
It is true that we have had some disappointments, but we have also enjoyed some good times. I think we are close to finding the right formula and there will be many big battles to come in the second half of the season, in both the Premier League and the Champions League. Expectations, of course, are very high at Chelsea, but I don't think we are far away from success. I believe the team is improving.

How do you feel you have adapted to living in London?
I knew London could be a tough place for a Latin player, so I have set up a system where my friends and relatives are always visiting and I get a cook to prepare Brazilian dishes for me at my home. This helps me feel happy and content. It also helps that I love London because it is an incredible city with so many options. You can find any cuisine in the world here, and there are so many theatres and wonderful places to visit. And the way English people react to you is also amazing. For such a big city, it is also very friendly.

Who has been the greatest influence on your career?
I was born with a football by my side. My father, Ladislao, was a professional footballer with Atletico Mineiro and from an early age I was in close contact with the game. My dad is my hero and he still wants to play and keep himself fit. I also admire him because he sacrificed his career for the good of his family by quitting the game to find a new job when his football career was in trouble.

You have become famous for your hairstyle...
I started to grow my hair when I was playing in Portugal because I was cold in the winter and I wanted to keep my ears warm. Now it just feels normal.

Tell us something about yourself that people might not already know...
I have begun a project to try to reduce my carbon footprint. I hired a company that calculated all my emissions, including car and plane journeys, as well as other energy consumption. I planted several trees in Parana, a state in Brazil, and have already managed to offset my 2011 emissions. I believe the final total was almost 18 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Interview by Fernando Duarte

storemags.com

More on *that* hairstyle...

"It is nearly all natural, but I admit I do give it an extra 'tweak'. The secret? That I cannot tell you because my hair has become such a trademark"

Facetoface

SEPP BLATTER

"My mistake was making FIFA profitable again after years of deficit"

The FIFA president, who celebrates 14 years in charge this June, hits back at his critics

You appeared to be quite relaxed at the recent ceremony in which Lionel Messi was awarded FIFA's Ballon d'Or...
When the best footballers in the world come together, joined by "King" Pele and "Kaiser" Franz Beckenbauer, and when there is a world-famous music star like Shakira, the atmosphere at a ceremony like that in Zurich is overwhelming. Football is an event, it is emotion, an attraction in the entertainment schedule of modern people. Even the newspapers in the German-speaking part of Switzerland have reported positively about that evening – which means we did a good job.

Shakira also performed the 2010 World Cup song. What is her relationship with FIFA?
At the ceremony Shakira announced that she would like to support FIFA in its social projects. It would be great to have a woman with such charisma at our side.

How united is the FIFA "family"?
At the FIFA Congress on June 1, 2011, there were only a few who didn't agree with their leader. I received more than 91 per cent of the votes, which shows that the football family stands united. And when the Congress ended, 98 per cent agreed with the reforms I proposed. That's a sign of deep confidence. The FIFA members trust in me. They are sure that, together with the FIFA executive committee, I will manage to lead our ship back into calm sea and keep on course. In these turbulent times many people forget the positive things that FIFA has achieved.

And what do you consider to be FIFA's greatest achievement?
Football is important and popular all over the world. Three hundred million people play football. More than a billion watch football. Football can build bridges and make people come together, especially in countries where there is war or a similar situation. When Iraq was occupied, people still played football. Just like in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Palestine a women's league has been established. And the Libya national team qualified for the African Cup of Nations. Football has become something great, a social and cultural good. My most important goal is to establish that social-cultural element in our society. Football is a school of life based on discipline, respect and fair play. We want to establish these elements of football in families, in society, in politics, in everyday life.

The game also generates large amounts of money...
Football has become a huge economic machine. And where there is much money at stake, the gamblers aren't far away. It is not easy to keep these gamblers under control. We need players who act as role models. In 1988, the German Frank Ordenewitz became one of our first fair play awardees. When he was asked by the referee, he admitted to having handled the ball. That was pure sport. In Zurich we honoured the Italian player Simone Farina for his courage in refusing to take part in match fixing, helping to identify the masterminds and rejecting their €200,000. That is the football of today. If we had more men like him, FIFA wouldn't have to co-operate with Interpol.

Some might suggest that there are "gamblers" to be found among FIFA's executive committee members...
We realised that in 2010, when the 2018 and 2022 World Cup venues were chosen. Half of the executive's members were involved in candidatures. Cunning English journalists set traps in which some fell. It became evident that not everything that glitters is gold with some people. After that, the FIFA ethics committee became involved. That's why I suggested that in future the venues of the World Cups should be chosen by all of the members, not only by the executive committee, which was accepted by an overwhelming majority. And that's why we implemented reforms and created the four task forces: for transparency and surveillance; for revision of statutes, with chairman Theo Zwanziger; the ethics committee; and Football 2014, with chairman Franz Beckenbauer. And we also persuaded the renowned expert for governance and anti-corruption, professor Mark Pieth, to become chairman of the independent committee of governance.

Just how independent are these four task forces?
All the task forces are willing to increase transparency and to implement far-reaching reforms.

And what time-frame has been set?
The major part of these reforms can be passed by the Congress which will take place in May in Budapest. I want the reformation to be finished by 2013, when the Congress comes together in Mauritius.

The supreme court of the Swiss canton of Zug has asked FIFA for access to the ISL files. It is said that the documents of the former FIFA marketing agency, which went bankrupt in 2001, contain the names of corrupt officials. Why haven't these files been made public yet?
I have been trying to open these vexed ISL files for a long time. I am ready to do so now – if the court agrees and there are no more appeals.

Do you know their contents?
I know about it rather vaguely, with no judicial details. As a matter of fact, I never received any payment – which the court confirmed long ago, in June 2010.

Do you know who is named?
Some of them no longer hold their positions, others have been suspended by the ethics committee. In Switzerland, until 2007, no law existed which declared ▸

On club versus country...

"If the clubs had their way there would be no national teams. But football without national teams is unimaginable. They have become a common good; they stand for the people's identification with their countries"

Storemags

payments to committees illegal. That means we are not talking about criminal offences. The law was changed in 2007 and the court expressed its view that recipients of payments must pay back part of the money. The position of FIFA remains the same: we didn't lose any money. We received all the money which had to be paid according to our TV and merchandising contracts.

So there will be no "tsunami", as threatened by Jack Warner?
No, there will be no tsunami. The former vice-president Jack Warner claims that in 1998, when I was elected, I gave him the TV rights for Trinidad for one dollar. This is not true. We had no influence on the issue of those rights. He gained them from the OTI, the Organizacion de Telecomunicaciones Iberoamericanas. Such stories are spread without any verification. I know what my mistake was: I made FIFA profitable again, after years of deficit, when I took office in 1998.

Support...Blatter with Shakira in Zurich

You did not vote for Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup, but UEFA president Michel Platini did...
I told nobody about my vote. It is a secret ballot. Platini said he voted for Qatar. If you want to know about his reasons, I am afraid you will have to ask him.

After he was elected to the executive committee, Theo Zwanziger, the president of the German FA, called for a review of the 2022 decision. Why did you ignore his request?
When the decision was made he was not a member of the executive. Recently I addressed the committee, saying that we have to speak with one voice and show solidarity with one another.

Could the 2022 World Cup be moved to the winter?
I assume you are asking that question because Michel stated that no one could play in the summer time when it is that hot. FIFA selected the venue under the condition that the tournament will be played in June and July. If anything is to change, Qatar would have to apply to FIFA. There has been no such application. If there was, the executive committee or the Congress would have to decide. But there is not much time left. We are about to set up the international match calendar for the years to come after 2014. We have to know when the World Cup will take place to do that.

Will the clubs be consulted in setting up the match calendar?
It is not FIFA alone that does that job. We co-operate with the general secretaries of the confederations. The match calendar is good, and we listen to suggestions. We did so over the issue of the double match days for the national teams, which are now scheduled for Fridays and Tuesdays instead of Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays. Now the players have more time to recover. The discussion about the match calendar is a discussion about the clash of interests between the clubs and the associations, as well as the national teams. Sometimes the people involved forget about the players.

Is the dispute between the clubs and the associations just about money?
That's the decisive matter. The clubs have a duty to release players for the national teams. The associations take out insurance, but that was not enough for the clubs. At the 2010 World Cup, we paid more than €40million to the clubs. In Brazil in 2014 it will be €70m. Now the clubs are demanding astronomical amounts for 2018 and 2022. We are going to discuss that with Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the president of the European clubs.

Speaking of Rummenigge, what was your reaction when Bayern Munich's CEO compared you to an eel on which "it is difficult to get a grip"?
I don't care about that any more. An eel is a fish, and I was born under the sign of Pisces. Our personal contacts have always been good. Whenever Rummenigge gets back to Munich, he fires again. If I took every statement seriously I might as well enter a monastery.

What about Bayern president Uli Hoeness, who wants a more open and public approach to discussing football's problems?
I don't have to deal much with Uli Hoeness. Let me tell you something I told Munich's mayor, Christian Ude, before a decision on the venue for the Winter Olympics 2018 was made. Uli Hoeness and others badly slandered South Africa in the 2010 World Cup run-up. I made it clear to Ude that Paris did not become the 2012 Summer Olympics' venue because they hadn't cared about the African votes. Issa Hayatou, the president of the African football association CAF, said to Franz Beckenbauer: "You cannot count on a single African vote for Munich. We didn't forget about the way you tried to destroy the African World Cup." You can't get the Olympics without the 12 African votes.

At the end of last year you demanded the establishment of professional referees. Does that mean German officials will be banned from future international competition?
German referees are always welcome. But if they want to take part in the 2014 World Cup they are obliged to be professionals. The German Football Association has to establish a system in which the referees are its employees.

Many German referees have good jobs which they don't want to give up...
I am convinced that Germany will solve that problem. In France, the referees in every professional league are professionals. In England, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and partly in Italy, that is common practice. There are schools for referees in some countries of the Middle East and in North Africa. In Honduras you can even study the subject at university.

And what about goal-line cameras? Will they be implemented before the 2014 World Cup?
In Brazil 2014 we will have the goal-line technology. We cannot afford the shame of 2010 again, when England was denied an equaliser against Germany. I was paralysed when I saw that.

Will another referee be needed when goal-line cameras are introduced?
No, no. Goal-line technology is not that complicated. The referees will be informed by a sound signal. There is no need for yet another referee. That will be discussed, just like the chip inside the ball, on March 2 and 3, by the International Football Association Board. Then, additional referees will be another issue.

How many referees would you like to see involved in a game?
There are now seven referees involved in a Champions League game. We did well with three or four. It is possible to assign more, but most of the associations do not have enough referees for that, and only a very few clubs can afford to pay for such a large number. It is UEFA that pays for the current experiment. In Mexico that experiment has been finished due to a lack of good referees.

Interview by Rainer Franzke/ESM

Talentscout

Paolo HURTADO

COUNTRY	Peru
CLUB	Alianza Lima
POSITION	Winger
AGE	21 (27.07.90)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Juan Aurich (loan)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	September 2011, v Bolivia
CAPS	2 (0 goals)

As the Juan Aurich players celebrated a first Peruvian title in December, one of the beaten Alianza Lima team could be excused for having mixed feelings.

With opportunities limited in the capital, Paolo Hurtado was loaned north to Aurich in 2009 and his time there left him with happy memories - "the dressing room was the most entertaining place I've been in my life," he recalls. It also kick-started his career and he continued the momentum picked up at Aurich after his return to Alianza in 2010. The following year he established himself as one of the brightest young talents in Peru and made his international debut.

Nicknamed "Little Horse", there is more to his game than merely speed and stamina – there is also evidence of thoroughbred ability. While having not yet acquired the same imposing physique, there are similarities with Manchester United and Ecuador winger Antonio Valencia. Versatile enough to play at right-back or in central midfield, he has shown his best form wide on the right for Alianza.

Running with the ball at pace, providing good service and cutting in to carry a goal threat, Hurtado's club displays won him two caps in friendlies against Bolivia last September. He may not have seen action in the World Cup qualifiers yet, but his time will surely come.

Much depends, however, on where he goes next. He came through the club's youth ranks, making his first-team debut in 2008. Four years on, several European clubs are circling and Alianza's precarious financial situation may force a sale.

> He is nicknamed "Little Horse" but there is more to him than speed and stamina – there is also evidence of thoroughbred ability

If so, Hurtado may regret not achieving his ambition of leaving the club as national champions. Sidelined by a knee injury in October, he was only fit enough to appear as a late substitute in the first leg of the Final against Juan Aurich. He started the return but was forced off before the end. In the decisive third game he was back to his best and was a strong candidate for man of the match.

Aurich may have won the title but Hurtado could at least feel in his loan spell he had played a small part in their rise. Now the "Little Horse" could well be involved in a higher-grade race.

Tim Vickery

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Marc-Andre TER STEGEN

COUNTRY	Germany
CLUB	Borussia Monchengladbach
POSITION	Goalkeeper
AGE	19 (30.04.92)

The character and style of the figure between the Gladbach posts certainly has gone from one extreme to another in the last 40 years.

Back in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the club won no fewer than five Bundesliga titles, their last line of defence was the eccentric and colourful Wolfgang Kleff, a thrill seeker if ever there was one. Times change, however, and if Marc-Andre Ter Stegen is already considered a candidate for the full national squad it is precisely because he is not a showman. Instead, he prioritises solidity, application and effectiveness.

The teenager goes about his job with the minimum of fuss, yet even this most calm and composed of individuals can be caught letting off emotional steam. Like legendary German custodian Oliver Kahn, the youngster likes to celebrate a vital save with a clinched-fist pose of delight and it was wholly fitting when Kahn recently described Ter Stegen as the second-best keeper in the Bundesliga behind Manuel Neuer of Bayern.

On Borussia's books from the age of four, his rise has indeed been meteoric. For most of last season he was content to understudy first-choice Logan Bailly, but with the team sinking fast into the relegation morass, coach Lucien Favre made a crucial decision in April to invert the pecking order and give Ter Stegen his chance.

Media consensus was that Favre had lost his mind, that pitching in a raw rookie at such a pressurised juncture was a gamble too far. Favre, though, hit back, saying: "I have every faith in the boy. He's a German youth international and won the European title with the under-17s a couple of years ago. He is a quality keeper. Who cannot see it is blind."

Extraordinary in his reflexes, handling of crosses and speed off his line, Ter Stegen looked a natural from the word go. And thanks in no small part to his nerveless displays Gladbach mounted the most improbable of escapes.

"The manner in which Marc-Andre came in at the eleventh hour to help steady the ship says everything about his amazing talent and maturity," says Gladbach's director of sport, Max Eberl.

"No one can say it was a fluke. He's continued to shine for us this term. It's almost frightening that someone so young is this good."

Nick Bidwell

Radja NAINGGOLAN

COUNTRY	Belgium
CLUB	Cagliari (Ita)
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	23 (04.05.88)
PREVIOUS CLUBS	Germinal Beerschot, Piacenza (Ita)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	May 2009, v Chile
CAPS	2 (0 goals)

Talent and will are not always enough to make the grade in football; sometimes a young player needs a coach with insight to put him on the right path. And that was very much the case with Radja Nainggolan, who was treading water until Mario Somma, his coach at Italian Serie B side Piacenza ordered him to stop operating as a second striker or playmaker three years ago and instead gave him a new on-pitch persona: that of an all-purpose midfielder.

Bought in 2005 by Piacenza from famous old Belgian club Germinal Beerschot, Nainggolan initially had severe reservations about the change of role. But ultimately he did as he was told and within a couple of months he was producing five-star performances on a regular basis, catching the eye with his stamina, fiery tackling, tactical sense and impressive passing.

"I made him think again as to what his strengths and weaknesses were," says Somma. "However, I must stress that if he's turned into a great prospect it's mostly because he realised that he had the tools to become a much more complete player. It was his choice to work so hard on improving his game."

The son of a Belgian mother and an Indonesian father, Nainggolan was snapped up by Cagliari in early 2010 and his star has continued to rise.

During the recent transfer window, the 23-year-old was a major transfer target for Juventus, only for Cagliari president Massimo Cellino to stubbornly pull down the shutters.

"I fancy Radja will one day play for Real Madrid," predicts Cellino. "But for the moment the status quo is the best position. He doesn't want to go and we don't want to sell."

Many Indonesian football fans identify with the great and the good in the Premier League. Now they have an excellent reason to follow one of their own in Serie A.

Nick Bidwell

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Jordy CLASIE

COUNTRY	Holland
CLUB	Feyenoord
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	20 (27.07.91)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Excelsior (on loan)

The revelation of this season's Eredivisie is not one to cut and run. While so many recent products of Feyenoord's academy have flown the nest at the first opportunity – Jeffrey Bruma and Nathan Ake (Chelsea), Kyle Ebecilio (Arsenal), Karim Rekik (Manchester City) and Rajiv Van La Parra (now back in Holland with Heerenveen after a stint in France with Caen) – Clasie was more than happy to stay, demonstrating a preference for the in-house and the organic which is now reaping huge dividends.

In his eyes, Feyenoord are not merely employers or a staging post on the road to a bigger payday. With the club since the age of nine, he has a deep attachment to the Rotterdammers' famous red-and-white-halved shirts and after just six months in the first team he is adamant that a transfer abroad is not around the corner.

"I'm not going to judge the guys who left," says the Dutch under-21 international, a diminutive but intensely-driven central midfielder with more than a hint of Wesley Sneijder in him.

"They had their reasons. I can only speak for myself and I've always thought it best to complete your football education where you're the most comfortable – and Feyenoord is my place.

"Ever since I was a kid my aim was to become a professional here, to regularly play in front of full-houses at De Kuip. That dream has now come true, but it doesn't mean it's the end of the story.

"I want to make a name for myself at Feyenoord, help the club win things again.

"I'm under contract until 2015, so any move abroad is much further down the line as far I'm concerned."

> "I wasn't taking any risk putting him in – he was ready"
>
> Feyenoord coach Ronald Koeman

Born and raised in Haarlem, to the west of Amsterdam, he is, however, every inch the archetypal Rotterdam footballer: gutsy, proud and busy. He competes with the heart of a warrior and generally makes up for his lack of inches with quick thinking and all-round liveliness. His passing, long or short, is crisp and accurate, he is clever in his support play and, all in all, he keeps the Feyenoord motor running. Not for nothing is his role model Barcelona's Xavi.

"I wasn't taking any risk at all when I included Jordy in the first team at the start of the season," says coach Ronald Koeman. "He was ready in all ways. He had the ability, confidence and desire and what's more he's Feyenoord-crazy.

"He had just completed a very successful year on loan at Excelsior [the Rotterdam outfit and Feyenoord feeder side] and proved he could cut it at this level. The fans here love him and so they should."

Nick Bidwell

FIVE TO FOLLOW

POTENTIAL STARS OF THE LIBERTADORES CUP

Luis CABALLERO

Club Olimpia (Par)
Age 21 (22.04.90)
Position Striker

Strong and versatile, he enjoyed a fine second half of 2011, forming an excellent partnership with the more experienced Pablo Zeballos as Olimpia won a first league title since 2000.

Hector CANTEROS

Club Velez Sarsfield (Arg)
Age 22 (15.03.89)
Position Midfielder

Stocky midfield organiser who is leading the latest generation of products from the Velez youth academy. Can play in the holding role or higher up. Has a good all-round game.

Kevin HARBOTTLE

Club Universidad Catolica (Chl)
Age 21 (08.06.90)
Position Midfielder

Support striker or attacking midfielder with pace, strength, balance and a good left foot. Showed flashes with Union Espanola in last year's Libertadores, before joining Catolica, where he ended 2011 in fine form.

Raul RUIDIAZ (Per)

Club Universidad de Chile (Chl)
Age 21 (25.07.90)
Position Striker

A new signing from Universitario of Lima, he carries a goal threat and is growing in confidence. Can operate up front or on the right flank and will likely have the tough task of replacing Eduardo Vargas, now with Napoli.

Macnelly TORRES

Club Atletico Nacional (Col)
Age 27 (01.11.84)
Position Midfielder

Playmaker with vision to spot a pass and the technique to deliver it. He helped Nacional win the first of two titles in 2011, and returns after a spell with San Luis in Mexico.

Tim Vickery

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Soccer Cities Lisbon

Peterjon Cresswell visits a city that is home to more than a quarter of Portugal's entire population and two of its 'Big Three' clubs

With just two miles separating their respective grounds, and a combined total of more than 350,000 members spread all over the Portuguese capital, **Benfica** and **Sporting Lisbon** have enjoyed the closest of rivalries for well over 100 years.

Formed by the union of two smaller clubs in 1904, Benfica were originally backed by the educated sons of middle-class families and former pupils of a school in Belem. However, a split in the ranks after two years saw half the membership leave to set up a rival team, which was to become known as Sporting Clube de Portugal.

Since the first derby match was staged – in December 1907 at Carcavelos, 10 miles down the coast from the capital – Benfica have had the edge on Sporting, winning more Primeira Liga titles (32 to 18), more European trophies (two to one) and, ultimately, more games between the pair.

Set apart from the big two, both in terms of geography and, since 2010, league tables, second-tier **Belenenses** are, apart from Boavista, the only club other than Benfica, Sporting and Porto to have won the Portuguese championship, taking the title in 1946.

Atletico, whose best days were way back in the 1940s, shortly after they were formed following the amalgamation of Carcavelinhos and Uniao de Lisboa, also play in the second division.

And as an added curio, Lisbon also has a national stadium like no other.

Set deep in the woods of Oeiras, and designed for public displays as well as sports events, the Estadio Nacional is the traditional home of the Portuguese Cup Final.

Derby delight...Sporting's Dutch striker Ricky Van Wolfswinkel attempts a spectacular bicycle kick against Benfica in November's clash

BENFICA

ESTADIO DA LUZ

Once able to hold 127,000 fans, the stadium was renovated in 2003 for the following year's European Championship and hosted the Final, in July 2004, when Greece beat the host nation. Now limited to 65,000 and built around a modern complex of shops, restaurants and a health club, the ground's nearest metro station is Colegio Militar-Luz on the blue line. Ticket prices start at €17.50 and are available from www.slbenfica.pt.

ESTADIO NACIONAL

Also known as "Jamor", the now outdated 37,000-capacity stadium was the venue for Celtic's European Cup Final victory over Internazionale in 1967 and still stages the Portuguese Cup Final most seasons. The ground is a 30-minute tram ride from Lisbon, followed by a 15-minute walk.

DIARY DATES

Sporting host Benfica at the Estadio Jose Alvalade on April 7 and will be hoping to avenge their 1-0 defeat earlier in the season at the Estadio da Luz, when Javi Garcia scored the home side's winner in the 42nd minute.

TRAGIC DERBY END

In one of his last derby matches, Eusebio scored both goals in Benfica's 2-0 win in December 1973. The result did not prevent Sporting going on to win the title, but the game is remembered for its tragic aftermath. On leaving the stadium, referee Fernando Leite and his two linesmen were killed in a car crash.

SPORTING LISBON

ESTADIO JOSE ALVALADE

Rebuilt in 2003 and financed almost entirely from supporters' donations, the 50,000-capacity arena – which contains a multiplex cinema and health club – takes its name from the viscount landowner who played a pivotal role in the club's foundation in 1906. Situated at Campo Grande, on the yellow and green metro lines, you can order tickets for a seat in the stand along either touchline (Bancada A or B) from the club's website, www.sporting.pt, for around €20-25. These can then be picked up at the ground, from three days in advance up to two hours before kick-off.

Odivelas
IC17
A8
Aeropuerto de Lisboa
Amadora
IC17
IP7
E1
ESTADIO JOSE ALVALADE
ESTADIO DA LUZ
IC19
Lisbon
IC15
ESTADIO NACIONAL
Lisbon
ESTADIO TAPADINHA
ESTADIO RESTELO
IP7
2 miles
2 km
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Almada
E1

ATLETICO

ESTADIO TAPADINHA

Less than a kilometre from the 25 de Abril Bridge that so dramatically crosses the Tagus, this 10,000-capacity stadium is on the other side of the main Avenida da Ponte from Alcantara station. Last hosted top-flight action in 1977.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

No European capital city is nearer to the beach than Portugal's Lisbon.

BELENENSES

ESTADIO RESTELO

Situated in Belem, which is 10 minutes by suburban train from Cais do Sodre, this 25,000-capacity arena is situated behind the Jeronimos Monastery.

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CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS

STANDARD BEARERS

The big names who lead by example

In control...both Schweinsteiger (left) and Germany have benefited from his switch to a deep-lying role

Former Bayern Munich coach Louis Van Gaal effectively rolled a double six when, midway through the 2009-10 season, he decided to switch **BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER** from a false-winger berth to the role of deep-lying, engine room co-ordinator. Just as Van Gaal forecast, the readjustment reaped immediate dividends for the Bundesliga side. And with usual Germany midfield fulcrum Michael Ballack missing the 2010 World Cup finals through injury, it was "Schweini" who took up the slack, masterfully setting the tone for his side's third-place finish.

Much more consistent than when operating on the wing, Schweinsteiger's priorities are not so much goals and assists as regaining possession and setting attacks in motion. And in these departments he is a world beater. Robust and intelligent in his covering and tackling, he is precise, imaginative and strategically sound in his distribution, touching the ball at least 100 times per game.

Schweinsteiger is Germany's on-pitch processor, the man who pulls the organisational levers. Although he does not wear the captain's armband – that honour belongs to full-back Philipp Lahm – there can be little doubt who the real leader is. When former Germany keeper Oliver Kahn complains that the current team lacks strong personalities, clearly Schweinsteiger has slipped his mind.

Once pigeon-holed as an incorrigibly wayward youngster, Schweinsteiger has grown up incredibly in recent times. With over 90 matches already under his belt at 27, he could well be in the same ballpark as his country's record appearance-maker Lothar Matthaus – who won 150 caps – before the end of his career.

Getting the job done...Van Bommel

Complete package ...De Rossi

Scrapping against the odds...Tymoshchuk

Ukraine skipper **ANATOLIY TYMOSHCHUK** is just as important to the hosts as his Bayern team-mate is to Germany. Protecting a back-four not known for their solidity will keep the 32-year-old midfielder busy all tournament long, but that's how he likes it and he is never happier than when scrapping against the odds.

It makes no difference to the ever-forceful Tymoshchuk – his country's most-capped player – that Ukraine are being written off as a squad of over-the-hill veterans and youngsters short of top-level know how.

An uncompromising character who is used to success with his club sides – he has been a domestic champion with Shakhtar Donetsk, Zenit St Petersburg and Bayern – Tymoshchuk is positively overflowing with optimism, encouraged, he says, by home advantage and the discipline, spirit and attention to detail instilled in the squad by coach Oleg Blohkin. So speaks Ukraine's "Iron Man" – a player who likes to stay warm at half-time with a series of chin-ups.

Because of his flair for gamesmanship and capacity for the sly and the provocative, veteran Holland midfield holder **MARK VAN BOMMEL** does not always receive the credit his abilities deserve. The bottom line, though, is that he is very good at his job, an expert at plugging gaps, solving tactical problems, and linking defensive and attacking phases. Never mind some of his more questionable antics, when it comes to underpinning the self-expression of others, Van Bommel invariably hits the right notes.

The multidimensional work in central midfield of Roma's **DANIELE DE ROSSI** should be instrumental to the plans of Italy boss Cesare Prandelli.

In his fourth major international tournament, De Rossi's tenacity as a ball winner, an excellent passer and possessor of a thumping shot make him the complete package, And he seems even more determined and hungry following Prandelli's decision to hand him a short ban last year for throwing an elbow in the face of Shakhtar's Darijo Srna in a Champions League tie.

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Nick Bidwell looks at the players in the centre of midfield who are likely to make their mark in Poland and Ukraine this summer

ON THE UP

Those that are rising to the challenge

Extremely mature and tactically aware for a 23-year-old, Barcelona midfield sentinel **SERGIO BUSQUETS** is one of the main reasons why all-conquering Spain can use any system and never miss a beat. As proficient in the tackling department as he is pressing, shadowing, heading and passing, he serves as both a security blanket and the distribution hub, always on the move, always in the right place.

Back in 2008, Spain's European title owed much to the work ethic and sense of sacrifice of defensive midfielder Marcos Senna. But since breaking into the national side three years ago, Busquets has managed to add another dimension to the role. He has far more technical subtlety and vision than Senna, and his greater mobility means Spain can now press much higher, in full-on Barcelona mode. His father, Carlos, was once a capable if rather erratic goalkeeper for Barca. Strange how his son has turned out to be anything but unreliable.

New dimension... Busquets

Although Czech Republic rising star **PETR JIRACEK** can push forward with the best on the left side of midfield – even earning comparisons with Czech footballing icon Pavel Nedved – the 25-year-old has come into his own lately as an all-action enforcer, thoroughly deserving his first cap last autumn. Recently acquired by Bundesliga club Wolfsburg from reigning Czech champions Viktoria Plzen, he was runner-up to Petr Cech in his country's player of the year poll for 2011.

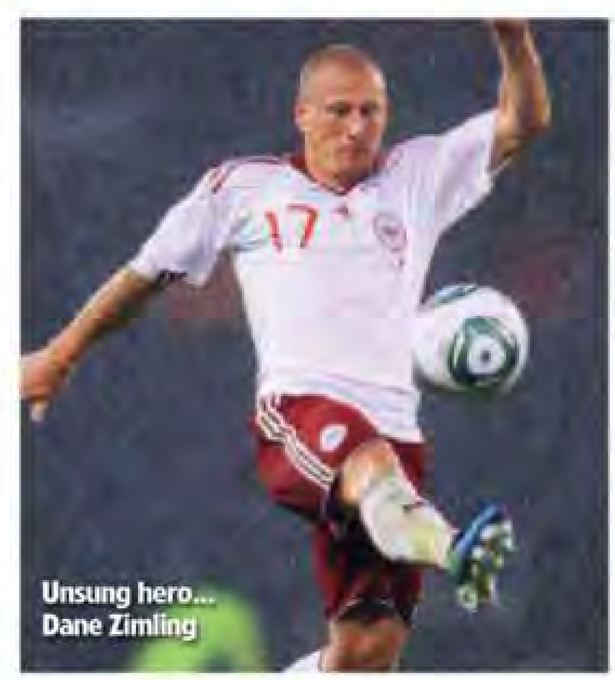
Comparisons with Nedved ...Jiracek

Terrier like...Polanski has given abrasiveness and spirit to underachievers Poland

While Stuttgart's **WILLIAM KVIST** is very much the flavour of the month in Denmark, lauded as the national team's linchpin and the thinking man's holding player, the contribution of his defensive midfield sidekick **NIKI ZIMLING** tends to be unfairly overlooked. The 26-year-old, who plays in Belgium for Club Brugge, has desire, strength and tenacity to burn, and his tandem with the cerebral Kvist is one of Denmark's most significant assets.

Since their World Cup exploits of the 1970s and 1980s, Poland have been serial tournament underachievers, singularly lacking in mental toughness and fighting spirit. But they could well have discovered the antidote in the abrasive shape of **EUGEN POLANSKI**, a terrier of a player with Mainz in the Bundesliga. Born in Poland but raised in Germany, he represented *Deutschland* at youth and under-21 level before opting to board the mothership last August.

During his season-and-a-half in the Premier League with Liverpool and now Chelsea, **RAUL MEIRELES** has yet to fully convince fans or pundits, but for Portugal his sphere of influence continues to widen. The 28-year-old serves as the team's multitasker, a valuable bundle of toughness, tactical culture and drive. Operating in a similar vein will be Zenit St Petersburg's **IGOR DENISOV** who, after turning down the chance to appear for Russia at Euro 2008, must produce this time around.


Unsung hero... Dane Zimling

Despite sticking by the no-nonsense engine-room pairing of Keith Andrews and Glenn Whelan, Republic of Ireland manager Giovanni Trapattoni might be forced at some point to release the handbrake. If so he might turn to **DARRON GIBSON** who, following his recent move to Everton from Manchester United, has much riding on the second half of the season.

WORK IN PROGRESS

The options are still open for some

Anchor...M'Vila

Talent...Wilshere

With the continental championship looming on the horizon, the configuration of France's central midfield remains in a state of some flux. Since taking over as national coach in August 2010, Laurent Blanc has alternated between a 4-3-3 with one holder, and 4-2-3-1 with twin minders. But up to now neither formula has proved a rip-roaring success, with each shape presenting signs of poor co-ordination and sketchy purpose.

The one thing that looks certain is that Rennes youngster **YANN M'VILA** will start come what may. His description of himself as a "pitbull who never lets go" tells only part of his story. Thanks to his athleticism, antenna for danger, comfort on the ball and clear preference for passing the ball forwards, he is everything Blanc wants in an anchorman. Should the coach decide to double the dose, the call should go out to either **YOHAN CABAYE** of Newcastle United or **BLAISE MATUIDI** of Paris Saint-Germain.

Choice...Dujmovic

One of the most difficult tasks facing Croatia chief Slaven Bilic is deciding who is best suited to the job of sweeping up in front of the back-four. Bilic has a soft spot for the Gattuso-like **OGNJEN VUKOJEVIC** of Dynamo Kiev, but he is not particularly popular in media circles or the stands, and when push comes to shove the job may go to either **TOMISLAV DUJMOVIC** - currently on loan at Zaragoza from Dynamo Moscow - **MILAN BADELJ** or **JERKO LEKO.**

A justifiable criticism of the coaches of Greece and Sweden is that they have too much faith in the old guard and that a transfusion of fresh blood is desperately required. Greek veteran **KOSTAS KATSOURANIS** and 35-year-old Swedish stalwart **ANDERS SVENSSON** are two prime examples.

Meanwhile, England manager Fabio Capello will have to live up to his reputation for ruthlessness when whittling down the endless list of candidates for his central midfield area.

Soldiering on...Svensson

No fewer than eight players - **STEVEN GERRARD**, **FRANK LAMPARD**, **GARETH BARRY**, **SCOTT PARKER**, **JACK WILSHERE**, **JAMES MILNER**, **PHIL JONES** and **JACK RODWELL** have decent claims, and striking the right balance of dynamism, speed and creativity will be key to England's chances. **WS**

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THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Valcke "note" causes further embarrassment

One of the factors undermining so many of Jack Warner's attacks on his old colleagues and chums on the FIFA executive had been the apparent lack of a paper trail.

But that changed following events concerning the ex-CONCACAF leader's claim that Sepp Blatter sold him Caribbean World Cup TV rights for one dollar in exchange for the support of the 35-strong regional block vote in presidential elections.

FIFA confirmed that Warner had been sold TV rights for a nominal fee and described this as a common strategy to raise development funds from the re-sale of those rights. However, it insisted there was no link between the TV deal and election votes.

All went quiet. For two weeks. Then the German newspaper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* published a private note from Blatter's right-hand man, Jerome Valcke, to Warner.

Valcke writes: "Here is the agreement signed by the P [the president]. This deal has not been through all normal boards or comm. Hence so I'm asking to make no publicity on it for the time being. Kind regards, Jerome."

The note has been validated apparently by FIFA but, on its own, offers no suggestion as to what "agreement" it may concern.

Valcke joined FIFA as the head of marketing in 2003, left in December 2006 as apparent scapegoat for the MasterCard/Visa sponsor switch only to return seven months later as general secretary (now termed secretary-general).

This was not the first embarrassment he may have been caused by Warner. Last year, remember, Warner published an email in which Valcke appeared to cast doubt on the manner in which Qatar had acquired host rights to the 2020 World Cup.

> "Here is the agreement signed by the P. This deal has not gone through all the normal boards or comm"

Sent note to Jack Warner... Jerome Valcke

Official...German ref Thorsten Schiffner

German refs in a flux

German refereeing officials have been thrown into a panic after FIFA president Sepp Blatter insisted that he wanted only full-time match officials at the 2014 World Cup finals (see page 62).

The reason was that the vast majority of German referees have other jobs and are not thus considered as football officials exclusively in employment terms.

In fact, England is one of the only countries whose top division is refereed by officials who can be considered truly full-time – which raises the prospect of an entire batch of Premier League refs running the show in South America in two years' time.

Not that this would be entirely new: in the late 1940s and early 1950s both Brazil and Argentina regularly sent for English referees to officiate at their most high-tension local club games.

Of course, in Brazil the World Cup will almost certainly see the usual politically-inspired selection of officials and nothing will be done to check out their "full-time" status.

As for England, the "Special Group" comprises 18 officials, 16 of whom really are full-time though several – like employees in all walks of life – have other, peripheral business interests. Eight are on the FIFA panel including, the most recent addition, 26-year-old Michael Oliver.

Even though World Cup Final referee Howard Webb, for example, is often described as a policeman he is currently on a five-year sabbatical from the beat.

Match performance marks, incidentally, are awarded by a Professional Game Match Officials Board representative and an assessor from either the Professional Footballers Association or the League Managers' Association.

So if a manager does not like a particular referee he might take up his complaint with his own association...

stemmags

Journalist Niersbach rises to the top

Commentators, observers, journalists and pundits may harbour the belief that they have superior ideas about running the game to the people who really do. But the prospect of any of them ever having the chance to put words into action is almost non-existent. Almost...but not totally.

Wolfgang Niersbach, who is about to switch from general-secretary to president of the German Football Association (DFB) – the most powerful in Europe, if not the world – is the exception who proves the rule.

Dusseldorf-born Niersbach, 61, started out as a journalist and spent 15 years covering football and ice hockey for the *Sport-Informations-Dienst* agency. He edited Fortuna Dusseldorf's match magazine then "crossed over" as press chief of the 1988 Euro finals in Germany.

He stayed on with the DFB as official spokesman and media director before becoming vice-president and media director for the 2006 World Cup. Months later Niersbach succeeded Bernd Pfaff as director of the DFB, and in October 2007 he took over from Horst R Schmidt as general-secretary.

The pace with which he is being ushered in illustrates how desperately the DFB Council wanted Theo Zwanziger – president since World Cup 2006 – out of the Frankfurt door.

Seat of power... Niersbach (right) will succeed Zwanziger (left) as DFB president in March

Zwanziger became a member of the FIFA executive committee at the start of June, in succession to Franz Beckenbauer, and has been appointed to lead the diplomatically delicate task of a statutes revision.

However, his DFB reign has been marked by PR disasters. The first was a damaging row with national coach Joachim Low over the renewal of his contract in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup finals. Then came an apparently never-ending string of refereeing scandals, including allegations of tax evasion by officials.

Zwanziger had agreed to go at this October's annual meeting but, "after consideration", he has now decided to bring forward the handover to the start of March. He also intends to write a book, which could be interesting.

Meanwhile, no longer wanted by his own federation, how much authority can Zwanziger really bring to his work on the FIFA and UEFA executives?

Blatter's former "advisor" is back on the scene

Reforms...Champagne

Jerome Champagne spent 11 years within FIFA in a variety of high-power roles, but generally he can be described as political adviser to president Sepp Blatter. However, all that came to an abrupt end in January 2010 when the French former diplomat and journalist was shown the door.

Champagne poked his inquisitive nose into too many other people's business and paid the price. But he has kept his ear as close as possible to the walls of the corridors of power and has now published his own reform proposals for the game.

The significance is that Champagne's perspective is that of a recent insider who has been very close to the seat of power.

He is no French revolutionary, more an evolutionary. He feels FIFA badly needs to right the imbalances which have developed between grass roots and professional football, between clubs and countries, between Europe and the rest of the world, between clubs and players, and address issues such as football's relationship with money, its status within the law and its global identity. He also wants a more effective voice for confederations, leagues, clubs and players, and a "fairer football income redistribution", as well as the obvious demands for governance based on modernity, transparency, democratic debate and ethics.

Above all, says Champagne, there is a need to "reconnect FIFA with the 'people of football'". That may prove even more difficult than structural reform as FIFA does not conjure popular respect throughout the game. WS

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6 of the best Bargain deals of last year

Nick Bidwell selects the shrewdest signings of 2011

1 Kevin STROOTMAN

PSV Eindhoven (Hol)

AGE
21 (13.02.90)
POSITION
Midfielder

A prominent performer for PSV this season following a summer switch from Utrecht, this midfield choreographer is proof that an easy-as-she-goes career is the most sensible.

From the moment he burst on to the Dutch scene at the age of 18, hordes of would-be buyers – not least Tottenham Hotspur and Fulham of the Premier League, Italian side Roma and Eredivisie outfit Twente – tried to tempt him into moving. But rather than risk everything on joining a high-profile club too soon, the youngster was happy to learn his craft in the considerably less pressurised environs of Sparta Rotterdam and Utrecht. The ability to play regularly and develop at his own pace has been the making of him, and when the PSV deal finally materialised in late June last year he was 100 per cent ready to adjust to the leap forward in standards.

While he may sometimes cut a rather casual figure, that is only because he has the control, nerve and ability that others so often lack. A wonderful deep-lying playmaker, his cultured left foot and ability to keep the ball circulating should ensure him a place in the Holland squad for the Euro finals this summer.

2

Magnus Wolff EIKREM

Molde (Nor)

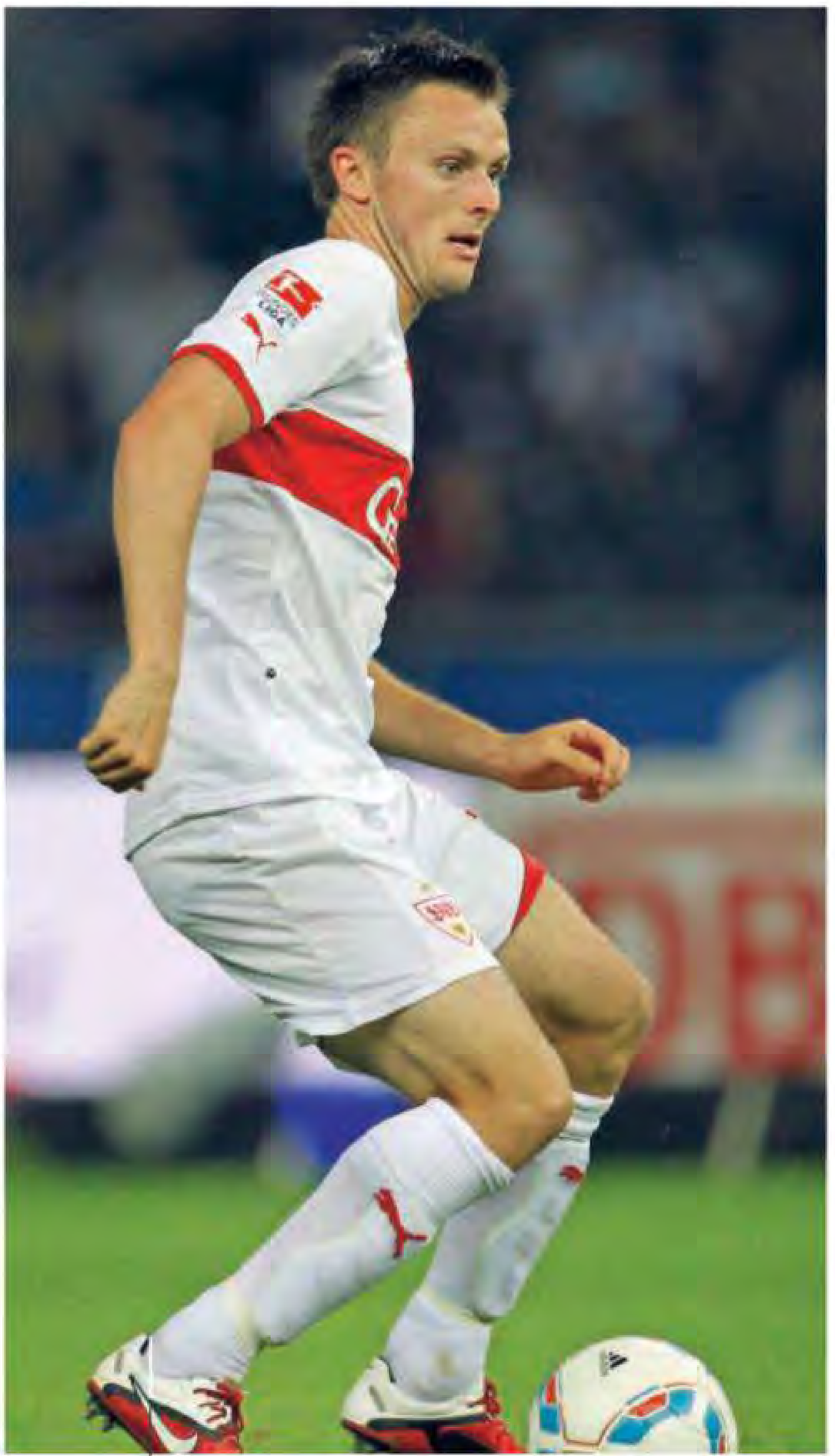
AGE
21 (08.08.90)
POSITION
Midfielder

More often than not, players who leave Manchester United find themselves on a downward spiral, destined for a sporting life of diminishing returns. But there are exceptions to every rule.

After five seasons in United's youth and reserve teams, this slender midfielder returned to his native land early in 2011 to play for alma mater club Molde, who are now coached by former Old Trafford striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. And what a homecoming it turned out to be as Molde walked off with the domestic title – their first in a century of existence.

Certain detractors complain that he does not work hard enough, and that may hold true to a degree, but putting a thoroughbred in a harness can run the risk of being counter-productive. Just let him perform and express himself; anyone who can pass with his accuracy should be celebrated.

A diabetes sufferer, the Norway international is the son of Knut Hallvard Eikrem, who played more than 200 games for Molde between 1983 and 1990.



3

William KVIST

Stuttgart (Ger)

AGE
26 (24.02.85)
POSITION
Midfielder

Although he could never be described as a ball-playing virtuoso or a mercurial match winner, in his own quiet way this Danish defensive midfielder has just as much to offer. And since joining Stuttgart from Copenhagen in a £3million deal, Bundesliga watchers have not stopped purring about his industry, selflessness, tactical awareness, solid distribution and strategic flair.

His first four months in Germany spoke volumes for his adaptability, strength of character and determination, and he is already firmly established as the soul and the brains of the Stuttgart operation with his simplicity and effectiveness. First and foremost he is a thinker – and that applies off the pitch as well.

Thanks to six years of study at the Copenhagen Business School, he is the proud owner of a Masters degree, and it was because of his commitment to his course that, until recently, he had been reluctant to move abroad.

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4 MICHU

Rayo Vallecano (Spa)

AGE
25 (21.03.86)
POSITION
Midfielder

In his inaugural season in the Spanish top flight and his first campaign with Rayo Vallecano – who he joined from Celta Vigo – this goalscoring midfielder has put his heart before hard cash and glamour, and nothing better illustrates his romantic ideals than the decision early in his career to turn down Real Madrid.

Most players are quick to heed the call of the Bernabeu but not the then 17-year-old, who thought it more important to stay in the third division and defend the colours of hometown club Oviedo.

With the latter for eight years and at Celta in the second tier for another four, he prides himself on his close links with club supporters. Offered the chance to play in La Liga with Sporting Gijon two years ago, he said no, arguing he would not have been comfortable pulling on the strip of Oviedo's fierce local rivals.

5 Antonio NOCERINO

Milan (Ita)

AGE
26 (09.04.85)
POSITION
Midfielder

Ostensibly signed in order to fill the gap in defensive midfield left by the long-term absence of Gennaro Gattuso, who is sidelined with a serious eye condition, Milan's £400,000 late-August addition from Palermo has also made his mark in attack. Having scored six times before Christmas, he went into the new year as the club's second-top scorer, behind Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

"Antonio has surpassed every hope we placed in him," says grateful Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani. "If he was called 'Nocerinho', like a Brazilian, all of Italy would be at his feet."

Born in Naples and schooled at Juventus – where he was a first-teamer during the 2007-08 season – he made his full international debut for Italy last year against Slovenia.

6 Salvatore SIRIGU

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)

AGE
25 (12.01.87)
POSITION
Goalkeeper

Of the nine recruits PSG's new Qatari owners ushered in last summer, the Italy international has proved by far the most worthy, virtually error-free in the first-half of the season and frequently saving a rearguard with more than one fault line.

Signed from Palermo for £3.25million in July when Nicolas Douchez suffered an ankle injury in pre-season, he is excellent when facing down opponents at close quarters, naturally authoritative and never flustered. He also deserves praise for his rapid mastery of the French language.

Former Italy and Internazionale keeper Walter Zenga looms large in the Sirigu story. While a teenager at Palermo, his resemblance in style to the great man earned him the nickname of "Walterino" and it was during Zenga's short-lived term as Palermo coach in 2009 that the youngster received his big break in Serie A.

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Last derby...Internazionale's Thiago Motta (left) gets to grips with Milan's Alexandre Pato shortly before joining Paris Saint-Germain

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Libertadores clash...El Nacional's Edison Preciado (right) holds off Nery Bareiro of Libertad

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Ban...Eto'o misses eight months

ARGENTINA

Showdown in the US
Alejandro Sabella's side will face Brazil in a friendly at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, USA, on June 9.

CAMEROON

Eto'o ban reduced
Samuel Eto'o had his 15-match ban for leading a player's strike in November cut to eight months. He is now suspended until the end of August and will miss the 2013 African Nations Cup qualifier against Guinea-Bissau and two World Cup qualifiers.

HOLLAND

Germany calling again
Holland and Germany, who meet in the Euro 2012 group stage on June 13, will play each other again, on November 14, in a friendly in Amsterdam. It will be the third time the rivals have met in a year, Germany having won last November's friendly 3-0.

MEXICO

Four back in the fold
Israel Jimenez, Javier Cortes, Maroc Fabian and Nestor Calderon – four of the eight players suspended for inviting women to their hotel rooms at the Copa America in July – returned to the national set-up as Mexico beat Venezuela 3-1.

Manuel De la Torre's side trailed to goal from Edgar Greco before Carlos Salcido equalised. Rafael Marquez Lugo and Oribe Peralta then secured victory with a goal each in the closing minutes.

Internationals

2013 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Preliminary round

1st leg

Jan 15 - Sao Tome
Sao Tome e Principe 1 (Jair pen 3)
Lesotho 0
HT: 1-0

2nd leg

Jan 22 - Maseru
Lesotho 0
Sao Tome e Principe 0
Att: 6,000
Sao Tome e Principe 1-0 on agg

Seychelles v Swaziland –
Swaziland withdrew; Seychelles walkover

1st round draw

Burundi v Zimbabwe
Central African Republic v Egypt
Congo v Uganda
Ethiopia v Benin
Gambia v Algeria
Guinea-Bissau v Cameroon
Kenya v Togo
Liberia v Namibia
Madagascar v Cape Verde Islands
Malawi v Chad
Rwanda v Nigeria
Sao Tome e Principe v Sierra Leone
Seychelles v DR Congo
Tanzania v Mozambique
1st legs - Feb 29, 2012; 2nd legs - June 15-17, 2012

2nd round

Direct qualifiers
(the 16 finalists from the 2012 African Nations Cup)
Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia

The 30 2nd round countries will be drawn in 15 head-to-head ties, the winners of which will qualify for the finals

1st legs - Sep 7-9, 2012; 2nd legs - Oct 12-14, 2012

Hosts South Africa qualify for finals automatically

KING'S CUP

In Bangkok, Thailand

Jan 15
Denmark league XI 1 (Makienok 70)
Norway 1 (Elyounoussi 79)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,240. **Ref:** Petsri (Tha)
Norway: Jarstein - Ruud, Reginiussen, Hovland, Vilsvik (Hedenstad 46), Elyounoussi, Henriksen (Eikrem 75), Jenssen (Lekven 85), Brenne (Singh 46), Soderlund (Berisha 62), Sorum (Abdellaoue 46).

Jan 15
Thailand 1 (Teeratep 53)
South Korea U-23 3 (Kim Dong-sub 44, Seo Jung-jin 69, Kim Hyun-sung 80)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Yamamoto (Jap)

Jan 18
Denmark league XI 0
South Korea U-23 0
Att: 300. **Ref:** Prathan (Tha)

Jan 18
Thailand 0
Norway 1 (Reginiussen 84)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Yamamoto (Jap)
Norway: Bugge Pettersen - Hagen, Hovland, Forren (Reginiussen 46), Vilsvik (Ruud 60), Elyounoussi (Drage 46), Henriksen, Eikrem, Singh (Brenne 90), Berisha (Abdellaoue 82), Berget (Soderlund 46).

Jan 21
South Korea U-23 3 (Kim Bo-kyung pen 17, Kim Hyun-sung 21, Seo Jung-jin 60)
Norway 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Chaiya (Tha)
Norway: Bugge Pettersen - Ruud, Reginiussen, Forren (Hovland 46), Hedenstad (Hagen 58), Elyounoussi, Henriksen (Eikrem 46), Lekven (Brenne 78), Jenssen (Singh 46), Berisha, Abdellaoue (Soderlund 46).

Jan 21
Thailand 1 (Sumanya pen 51)
Denmark league XI 3 (Makienok 10, Spelmann 43, Ornskov 90)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Yamamoto (Jap)

KING'S CUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Korea U-23	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Denmark lge XI	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Norway	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Thailand	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

FRIENDLIES

Friday, January 6

Jan 6 - Bata
Equatorial Guinea 0
South Africa 0
South Africa: Khuzwayo - Gaxa (Allie), Gcaba, Gould, Mathoho, Letsholonyane, Claasen (W Arendse), Mashaba (Maluleka), Mahlangu, Grobler (Nontshinga), Scott (Chapman). *Sent off: Gould 62min.*

Saturday, January 7

Jan 7 - Gaborone
Botswana 0
Zimbabwe 0
Att: 6,500
Botswana: Marumo (Maposa 78) - Motlhabankwe, Ramohibidu, Letsholathebe, Gabonamong, Nato, Motsepe (Tshekiso 75), Mongala (Moloi 60), Ramatlhakwane, Selolwane (Moatlhaping 60), Mogorosi (Ngele 60).
Zimbabwe: Arubi - Kumbuyani, Vheremu, Zhokinyi, Aminl, Makopa (Chinungwa), Mambare, Sibanda (Mutuma 67), Malajila, Ngodzo (Samanja 71), Mukamba (Whitby 60).

Monday, January 9

Jan 9 - Bitam
Gabon 0
Burkina Faso 0

Jan 9 - Sharjah, UAE
Tunisia 3 (Khelifa 11, Dhaouadi 63, Chermiti 90+1)
Sudan 0
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Yussef (Sudan) 73min
Tunisia: Mathlouthi (Jeridi 46) - Iffa (Boussaidi 46), Jemal, Haggui, Abdennour, Saihi (Ragued 55), Traoui, I Msakni (Darragi 46), Allagui (Y Msakni 65), Dhaouadi, Khelifa (Chermiti 69).

Wednesday, January 11

Jan 11 - Abuja
Nigeria 0
Angola 0

Jan 11 - Johannesburg
South Africa 1 (Gcaba 54)
Zambia 1 (Sunzu 8)
HT: 0-1
South Africa: Khuzwayo - Nthethe, Allie (Rudiger), W Arendse, Gcaba, Letsholonyane (Masalesa), Maluleka (N Vilakazi), Mahlangu (Sangweni), Lebese (Mashaba), Chapman (S Vilakazi), Nontshinga (Majoro).
Zambia: Mweene - Lungu, Mulenga, Kasonde, Sunzu, Chansa, C Katongo, Kalaba, Mbesuma, Mayuka, Sinkala.

Thursday, January 12

Jan 12 - Dakar
Senegal 1 (D Ba 22)
Sudan 0
HT: 1-0
Senegal: Coundoul - Faty (Sall 46), Mbengue (Daf 46), Diakhate (Sane 16), Diawara, Ndaw (R Gomis 46), Diame, Ndoye (S Camara 46), Niang (P D Cisse 46), D Ba (A Traore), Sow.

Friday, January 13

Jan 13 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Tunisia 0
Ivory Coast 2 (Kalou 44, Drogba pen 47)
HT: 0-1
Tunisia: Mathlouthi - Iffa, Haggui, Abdennour, Jemal (Chemmam 81), Chedli (Y Msakni 37), Ragued, Traoui (Chermiti 83), Khelifa, Chikhaoui (Darragi 62), Dhaouadi (Allagui 57).
Ivory Coast: Barry - Lolo (Zokora 46), K Toure, Bamba, Tiene (Boka 60), Keita (Gradel 46), Gosso (Coulibaly), Tiote, Kalou (Doumbia 70), Drogba (Bony 76), Ya Konan (Zokora 46). *Sent off: Tiote 73min.*

Saturday, January 14

Jan 14 - Cabinda
Angola 3 (Manucho Goncalves 14, Mateus 38, Flavio 76)
Sierra Leone 1 (Desmond Wellington 15)
HT: 2-1
Angola: Carlos - Marco Airosa, Dany, Zuela, Miguel (Amaro 81), Djalma (Mingo Bille 86), Andre Macanga (Dede 81), Gilberto (Osorio 89), Mateus (Vunguidica 78), Flavio (Manucho Barros 89), Manucho Goncalves (Love 81).
Sierra Leone: Caulker - Fornah (Dollar 46), A Kanu, Desmond Wellington, I Kamara, Sama (Idrissa Sesay 36), Mansarah (D Kanu 46), King, Daddy, Fofanah (Donald Wellington 56), M Sesay (Iyamusa Sesay 62).

Jan 14 - Johannesburg, South Africa
Namibia 0
Zambia 0
Zambia: Mweene - Lungu, Himoonde, Chintu, Musonda (N Mulenga), C Katongo (C Mulenga 75), Sinkala, Chansa (F Katongo 60), Kalaba, Chamanga (Mayuka 46), Mbesuma (Kangwa).

Sunday, January 15

Jan 15 - Muscat
Oman 2 (Al Owaisi 7, Muddafar 57)
DR Congo 2 (Ngoyi 46, Angani 78)
HT: 1-0

Jan 15 - Phokeng
South Africa 1 (Sangweni 7)
Ghana 1 (Muntari 12)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bennett (SAf)
South Africa: Khuzwayo - Nthethe, Rudiger, Gcaba, W Arendse, Sangweni (Masalesa 87), Mashaba (Lebese 55), Scott (Mathoho 90), Maluleka (S Vilakazi 65), Chapman (N Vilakazi 73), Nontshinga (Majoro 46; Phungwayo 90+1).
Ghana: Kwarasey - Paintsil, Boye, John Mensah, Alhassan, D Boateng, Agyemang-Badu, Inkoom, Muntari, A Ayew, J Ayew. *Subs used: Tagoe, Opare, Addy, Jonathan Mensah, Vorsah, Asamoah, Takyi, Annan, Abu.*

Monday, January 16

Jan 16 - Franceville
Gabon 0
Sudan 0

Jan 16 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Libya 0
Ivory Coast 1 (Kalou 60)
HT: 0-0
Ivory Coast: Barry - Tiene (Boka), K Toure, Bamba, Lolo (Coulibaly), Tiote (Zokora), Gosso (Angoua), Y Toure (Doumbia), Drogba, Kalou (Gradel), Gervinho.

Tuesday, January 17

Jan 17 - Kuwait City
Kuwait 1 (Al Mutawa 86)
Uzbekistan 0
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, January 18

Jan 18 - Doha, Qatar
Bahrain 0
Sweden 2 (Hysen pen 58, Hiljemark 81)
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Omar (Bahrain) 57min
Sweden: Par Hansson - Adam Johansson, Backman, Hamad, A Svensson, Ishizaki (Claesson 73), Hysen (Marcus Olsson 64), Jansson (Dyrestam 86), Demir (Salomonsson 80), Hiljemark (Friberg 86), Hult (Durmaz 73).

Saturday, January 21

Jan 21 - Glendale
United States 1 (Clark 90+7)
Venezuela 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,403. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
United States: Hamid - DeLaGarza, Parkhurst, Cameron, Pearce (Loyd 72), Larentowicz (Clark 62), Jones, Zusi (Sapong 74), Feilhaber (Wondolowski 62), Shea, Bunbury (Evans 88).
Venezuela: Morales - Rivero, Salazar, Velasquez, Rouga, Mea Vitali (Renteria 78), Guerra (Guerrero 89), F Flores, A Flores, Perez Greco (Chourio 73), Moreno (Blanco 86). *Sent off: Velasquez 90+8min.*

Sunday, January 22

Jan 22 - Sidon
Lebanon 1 (Zreik 56)
Iraq 0
HT: 0-0

Jan 22 - Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (M Williams 33, Molino 66)
Finland 3 (Riski 34, Kolehmainen 73, Aaritalo 77)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Campbell (Jam)

Winner...South Korea under-23 striker Kim Hyun-sung (left)

RUSSIA

Euro friendlies

Euro 2012 warm-up games have been arranged against Uruguay (May 25 in Moscow), Liechtenstein (May 29 in Switzerland) and Italy (June 1 in Switzerland).

SAO TOME E PRINCIPE

Success at last

The island in the Gulf of Guinea won its first international match for 11 years, beating Lesotho 1-0 on aggregate to reach the next qualifying round of the 2013 African Nations Cup.

SOUTH AFRICA

Two see red

Captain Morgan Gould and coach Pitso Mosimane were both sent off as South Africa drew 0-0 away to African Nations Cup co-hosts Equatorial Guinea in the inauguration of the new 40,000-seat Estadio Bata.

SOUTH KOREA

Youngsters win again

South Korea under-23s won their 11th Thai King's Cup title, beating Norway 3-0 in the deciding round-robin game. They had earlier beaten hosts Thailand 3-1 and drawn 0-0 with defending champions Denmark.

USA

Jones is skipper

Schalke midfielder Jermaine Jones, who is serving an eight-week Bundesliga ban, captained a USA side made up of mostly home-based players in victories against Venezuela and Panama.

Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip - Gonzales, M Williams, J Jones (De Silva 57), Adams (Russell 77), Power, Leon, Jagdeosingh (Plaza 57), Guerra (Rochford 65), Molino (Boucher 80), Roy (Jorsling 65).
Finland: Hradecky - Halsti, Toivio, Sumusalo, Hamalainen (Aijala 86), Sjolund (Patronen 90), Riski (Mannstrom 46), Sorsa (Aho 74), Kauko (Pelvas 74), Kolehmainen, Sadik (Aaritalo 31).

Wednesday, January 25

Jan 25 - Houston, USA
Mexico 3 (Salcido 69, Marquez Lugo 88, Peralta 89)
Venezuela 1 (Perez Greco 51)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,128. **Ref:** Jurisevic (USA)
Mexico: Corona - Duenas, Salcido, Ayala, Jimenez, I Castro (Marquez Lugo 66), Zavala (Molina 56), Cortes (Andrade 64), Calderon (Aquino 56), Fabian, Peralta (Torres Nilo 90).
Venezuela: Morales - Salazar, Velasquez, Quijada, Rivero, F Flores (Arocha 87), Mea Vitali, Perez Greco, Guerra, Machis (Moreno 75), Reyes (A Flores 83).

Jan 25 - Panama City
Panama 0
United States 1 (Zusi 9)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Chacon (Mex)
Panama: Mejia - Rodriguez, Vasquez, Dasent, Algandona, Waithe (Ovalle 71), Sanchez, Gomez (De Gracia 90+2), Quintero (Botello 77), Perez, Renteria (Mosquera 75).
United States: Rimando (S Johnson 46) - DeLaGarza, Parkhurst, Cameron, Loyd (Pearce 41), Clark (Larentowicz 67), Jones, Wondolowski (Parke 55), Zusi (Evans 66), Shea, Bunbury (Sapong 76).
Sent off: Cameron 52min.

Friday, January 27

Jan 27 - Belek, Turkey
Romania 4 (M Niculae 3, pen 90, Tanase 47, 51)
Turkmenistan 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 50. **Ref:** Belian (Arm)
Romania: Tatarusanu - Papp, Gaman (Grigore 86), Chiriches, Grecu, Chipciu (Roman 46), Pintilii (Gardos 68), Neagu (Bourceanu 46), Tanase (Bumba 79), Goga (Marinescu 46), M Niculae.

Sunday, January 29

Jan 29 - Dubai
United Arab Emirates 1 (Matar 70)
Uzbekistan 0
HT: 0-0

2012 AFC CHALLENGE CUP FINALS

In Kathmandu, Nepal

Match schedule

Group A
Mar 8: Nepal v Palestine; Turkmenistan v Maldives
Mar 10: Palestine v Turkmenistan; Maldives v Nepal
Mar 12: Nepal v Turkmenistan; Maldives v Palestine

Group B
Mar 9: North Korea v Philippines; India v Tajikistan
Mar 11: Philippines v India; Tajikistan v North Korea
Mar 13: North Korea v India; Tajikistan v Philippines

Semi-finals
Mar 16: Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd; Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd

3rd-place play-off
Mar 19

Final
Mar 19

Winners qualify for the 2015 Asian Cup finals

2014 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA SECTION

● 5 finals places available

2nd round draw

Group A
Botswana, Central African Rep, Ethiopia, South Africa

Group B
Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Tunisia

Group C
Gambia, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Tanzania

Group D
Ghana, Lesotho, Sudan, Zambia

Group E
Burkina Faso, Congo, Gabon, Niger

Group F
Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria

Group G
Egypt, Guinea, Mozambique, Zimbabwe

Group H
Algeria, Benin, Mali, Rwanda

Group I
Cameroon, DR Congo, Libya, Togo

Group J
Angola, Liberia, Senegal, Uganda

Games to be played June 1, 2012-Sep 6, 2013

● Group winners qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

● The 10 qualifiers will be paired in 5 2-leg ties (to be played Oct 11-Nov 19, 2013), the winners of which qualify for the finals

ASIA SECTION

● 4.5 finals places available

3rd round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan (Q)	5	4	0	1	10	4	12
Iraq (Q)	5	4	0	1	7	3	12
China	5	2	0	3	7	5	6
Singapore	5	0	0	5	1	13	0

Remaining games
29.02.12: China v Jordan; Iraq v Singapore.

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	5	3	1	1	12	4	10
Lebanon	5	3	1	1	8	10	10
Kuwait	5	2	2	1	8	7	8
UAE	5	0	0	5	5	12	0

Remaining games
29.02.12: South Korea v Kuwait; UAE v Lebanon.

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uzbekistan (Q)	5	4	1	0	7	1	13
Japan (Q)	5	3	1	1	14	2	10
North Korea	5	2	0	3	2	3	6
Tajikistan	5	0	0	5	0	17	0

Remaining games
29.02.12: Japan v Uzbekistan; Tajikistan v N Korea.

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	5	4	0	1	9	3	12
Saudi Arabia	5	1	3	1	4	3	6
Oman	5	1	2	2	1	6	5
Thailand	5	1	1	3	4	6	4

Remaining games
29.02.12: Australia v Saudi Arabia; Oman v Thailand.

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (Q)	5	3	2	0	15	3	11
Qatar	5	2	3	0	8	3	9
Bahrain	5	1	3	1	3	7	6
Indonesia	5	0	0	5	3	16	0

Remaining games
29.02.12: Bahrain v Indonesia; Iran v Qatar.

● Top 2 in each group qualify for 4th round

4th round

● The 10 qualifiers will be divided into 2 groups of 5 teams (games to be played June 3, 2012-June 18, 2013). The top 2 in both these groups qualify for the finals
● The 2 3rd-placed teams will meet in a 2-leg play-off (Sep 6 & 10, 2013), the winners of which will meet the 5th-placed South American team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

CONCACAF SECTION

● 3.5 finals places available

3rd round draw

Group A
Antigua & Barbuda, Guatemala, Jamaica, United States

Group B
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guyana, Mexico

Group C
Canada, Cuba, Honduras, Panama

Games to be played June 8-Oct 16, 2012

● Top 2 in each group qualify for the 4th round

4th round

● The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played Feb 6-Oct 15, 2013), with the top 3 qualifying for the finals
● The 4th-placed team will meet the Oceania section winners in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

EUROPE SECTION

● 13 finals places available

Draw

Group A
Belgium, Croatia, Macedonia, Scotland, Serbia, Wales

Group B
Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Malta

Group C
Austria, Faroe Islands, Germany, Kazakhstan, Republic of Ireland, Sweden

Group D
Andorra, Estonia, Holland, Hungary, Romania, Turkey

Group E
Albania, Cyprus, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland

Group F
Azerbaijan, Israel, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Russia

Group G
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovakia

Group H
England, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, San Marino, Ukraine

Group I
Belarus, Finland, France, Georgia, Spain

Games to be played Sep 7, 2012-Oct 15, 2013

● The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals
● The 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 2-leg play-offs (Nov 15 & 19, 2013), the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

OCEANIA SECTION

● 0.5 finals places available

2nd round draw

Group A
New Caledonia, Samoa, Tahiti, Vanuatu

Group B
Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands

Games to be played June 3-11, 2012, in Fiji

● The top 2 in each group qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

● The 4 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played Sep 7, 2012-Mar 26, 2013), the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

SOUTH AMERICA SECTION

● 5.5 finals places available, one of which goes automatically to hosts Brazil

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uruguay	3	2	1	0	9	3	7
Argentina	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
Venezuela	4	2	1	1	3	3	7
Ecuador	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Chile	4	2	0	2	7	10	6
Colombia	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Paraguay	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Peru	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Bolivia	4	0	1	3	4	8	1

Games being played Oct 7, 2011-Oct 15, 2013; each team will play 16 games (8x2)

● The top 4 qualify for the finals
● The 5th-placed team will meet the winners of the Asia section play-off in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

KEY TO TABLES
(Q) = qualified for next round

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LIBERTADORES CUP

Holders Santos hope to learn lessons

Looking up...humiliation by Barcelona in the Club World Cup could provide extra motivation for Neymar (left) and Ganso as Santos seek to retain their continental crown

Brazilian football can boast the reigning Libertadores champions, has provided nine of the last 14 finalists and is paying much higher wages than anywhere else on the continent. But 2011 – just when the financial gap was opening all the wider in its favour – was an extremely poor year for Brazil's clubs in international competition, and the warning signs were flashing well before Barcelona took Santos apart in the Club World Cup Final.

Santos were worthy winners of last year's Libertadores, but their campaign was seldom entirely convincing. They could easily, like all their compatriots, have fallen before the quarter-finals. The Sudamericana Cup in the second half of the year reinforced the trend, with the Brazilians suffering against opponents who fielded strikers in wide spaces.

The reaction of the Brazilians, then, will be one of the most fascinating themes of the 53rd Libertadores. The country has a strong contingent of clubs in the competition, starting with the holders, Santos, who on paper look stronger than last year. Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso have been retained, with the latter now hoping his injury problems are behind him.

Coach Muricy Ramalho was unwise to claim the trouncing dished out by Barcelona would have no impact on a team that had spent six months waiting to be judged against the best. But the painful events of December 18 could serve as extra motivation to win a fourth title and have another crack at the winners of the UEFA Champions League.

An obsession

Santos' near neighbours **Corinthians** enviously await a first Libertadores success, which has become something of an obsession since all their main local rivals already have their names on the list of champions. Coach Tite's side claimed the Brazilian championship in December with a campaign that was solid and consistent rather than dazzlingly brilliant, and something more might be required to deal with the pressure of fulfilling the club's dream.

Another Brazilian club with no Libertadores titles to its name look stronger. Providing playmaker Deco and centre-forward Fred can stay fit, **Fluminense** might even be considered tournament favourites, especially since they have been re-enforced by attacking midfielders Wagner and Thiago Neves. But while goals would seem guaranteed, questions remain over the defence.

Two other Rio clubs are also dreaming of glory. **Vasco da Gama** can count on the experience of Felipe and Juninho from the side that won the title 14 years ago, along with the more youthful talent of centre-back Dede, midfielder Romulo and newly acquired imports such as Ecuador World Cup centre-forward Carlos Tenorio.

Flamengo have high hopes that striker Vagner Love – brought back from CSKA Moscow – will help get the best out of the ever-enigmatic Ronaldinho. The club's ever-turbulent atmosphere went into overdrive at the start of the year with a rift opening up between Ronaldinho and coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo.

Despite a shock 2-1 first-leg defeat against Bolivia's Real Potosi, Flamengo successfully got through the qualifying stage, as did **Internacional** of Porto Alegre, who were up against Colombia's dangerous Once Caldas. The signings of Dagoberto, Marco Aurelio and the Argentinian winger Jesus Datolo give Inter the kind of pace they have lacked since Taison was sold after the triumphant 2009 Libertadores campaign. Playmaker Andres D'Alessandro looks set to stay after turning down an offer from China, while Oscar and striker Leandro Damiao also have plenty to offer.

Could Argentinian clubs take advantage if Brazil has another bad year? The standard of the country's first division is not strong and for the last five years it has provided only one quarter-finalist. But at least **Boca Juniors** are back after a two-year absence. Coach Julio Cesar Falcioni found a way of playing an old fashioned No 10 in Juan Roman Riquelme with two strikers while maintaining defensive balance. Sitting relatively deep, with one of the front pair dropping behind the line of the

Adventurous...2011 finalists Penarol

ball, the defensive unit performed well winning the recent domestic title, but a lack of pace might be exposed if the side are forced to chase the game.

Unlucky to lose in last year's semi-final, **Velez Sarsfield** lost attacking potency with the sale of Maxi Moralez and striker Santiago Silva (now at Boca). Well administered, they have a talented generation of youngsters coming through, but this year might be a little early to challenge.

The other Argentinian sides look solid, but short of the quality needed to go all the way. **Lanus**, with the pace of Uruguayan striker Mario Regueiro and the class of midfielder Diego Valeri, are probably best equipped. **Godoy Cruz** have done well to qualify for a second successive year. They have managed to retain centre-forward Ruben Ramirez and powerhouse midfielder Diego Villar, but it is hard to see them going beyond the quarter-finals. The same applies to **Arsenal**, despite the presence of some interesting wide midfielders.

Tricky qualifier

Last year Paraguay were the only country with two representatives in the last eight, and one of them, **Libertad**, are back again. It is their 10th consecutive campaign, but under Jorge Burruchaga the team have not displayed the same attacking brio as last year's model. They had to overcome a 1-0 first-leg defeat against El Nacional of Ecuador to make the group stage.

Returning for the first time since 2004 are three-times champions **Olimpia**, whose strike partnership of Pablo Zeballos and Luis Caballero looks promising. They also have experience at the helm as Uruguayan coach Gerardo Pelusso is a Libertadores veteran.

Pelusso was in charge of **Universidad de Chile** two years ago when they became the first club from the country to reach the semi-finals since 1997. Last year, playing much more expressive football under Jorge Sampaoli, *La U* won both domestic titles and the Sudamericana Cup. They have paid the inevitable South American price for success – some of their key players, such as striker Eduardo Vargas, have moved on – but there are some interesting reinforcements, such as playmaker Pedro Morales and Peruvian striker Raul Ruidiaz. They are in a difficult group and Sampaoli has little time to impose his philosophy on a much-changed side, but all eyes will be on them.

Last year's run to the quarter-finals by **Universidad Catolica** is more evidence for the view that Chilean club football is on the rise. This year Mario Lepe's men look even more interesting. New Paraguayan centre-forward Roberto Ovelar is good with his back to goal, Kevin Harbottle is a promising support striker and other interesting reinforcements include national team midfielder Matias Campos Toro and striker Nicolas Trecco. The defence is suspect, but if slightly-built playmaker Felipe Gutierrez is up for it, Catolica will take some stopping.

Mexican sides are often strong and two of this year's representatives, **Cruz Azul** and **Guadalajara**, have both reached the Final, in 2001 and 2009 respectively. Much depends on the priority given to the tournament, such are the difficulties of reconciling participation in the Libertadores with domestic duties. Champions **Tigres**, for example, sent a largely reserve side to play the away leg of their qualifying game against Chile's Union Espanola and lost 1-0. They then went out of the competition after only drawing 2-2 in the return.

Nacional of Colombia. Their problem is the lack of time coach Santiago Escobar has to construct a coherent side from a plethora of new signings, especially since a tough group should leave little margin for error. The link between playmaker Macnelly Torres and rapid flank striker Dorlan Pabon should be vital, with attacking midfielder Luis Fernando Mosquera another to look out for.

Olimpia bid...Caballero (left) and Zeballos

A state of flux is the norm for the big Uruguayan clubs, once so strong in the competition but now condemned by a tiny domestic market to the continued selling of promising youngsters. But after years in the wilderness there have been signs of a comeback, with **Nacional** reaching the semi-finals in 2009 and **Penarol** beaten finalists last year.

Good youth development work is not the only factor in the upturn, and retuning veterans are also playing a part and Nacional pin many of their hopes on playmaker Alvaro Recoba. Meanwhile, Penarol's old timers showed their value in the qualifying round against Caracas, with Fabian Carini saving a penalty while Marcelo Zelayeta and Fabian Estoyanoff got on the score sheet. Coach Gregorio Perez has fashioned an adventurous side, but another appearance in the Final looks a long way off for the first-ever winners of the Libertadores.

Tim Vickery

Providing playmaker Deco and centre-forward Fred can stay fit, Fluminense might even be considered tournament favourites

Dictating the play...Riquelme (in blue) and Boca are Argentina's best bet, but Lanus' Luis Araujo will also look to make his mark

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Basle v Bayern Munich

BASLE V BAYERN MUNICH FEBRUARY 22 BAYERN MUNICH V BASLE MARCH 13

Bayern have Munich Final in their sights

Bayern finished 2012 as the "winter champions" of the Bundesliga and came through a potentially difficult Champions League group, finishing above Napoli, Manchester City and Villarreal. They are in the knockout stage for a fourth consecutive season and have the added incentive of the 2012 Final being played in their home stadium.

Basle pulled off one of the surprises of the group stage when they beat Manchester United 2-1 at home in their final group game. Their home record against Bundesliga sides, however, is not good, having lost four out of five matches. But the Swiss club's coach Heiko Vogel, who succeeded Thorsten Fink in October, knows a number of the Bayern players well, having coached Bayern's youth teams in the past.

"Once more, David fights Goliath," said Vogel. "We accept this role and want to trip up Bayern. But for that to happen, everything has to come together."

Beware...Basle must not give Kroos (left) too much freedom

Basle are still without winger Valentin Stocker, who suffered a setback in his recovery from a serious knee injury, while Bayern are likely to be without Daniel Van Buyten (broken metatarsal) but can call upon influential midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger, who has recovered from a broken collarbone.

The absence of Van Buyten will add to the doubts about Bayern's defensive capabilities, but those fears will be outweighed by the form of striker Mario Gomez, the Bundesliga's top scorer who has been in sparkling form this season.

> "Once more, David fights Goliath. We accept this role and want to trip up Bayern. But for that to happen, everything has to come together"
>
> **Basle's Heiko Vogel**

Important...Huggel (left) must win battle for the midfield

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Won and lost in the middle

When 4-4-2 meets 4-2-3-1, the major issue is the battle for the centre. In theory, the side playing 4-2-3-1 has an extra man in midfield and should be able to dominate possession. But if Basle's full-backs can occupy the two wide players in Bayern's creative three, pushing the game up the pitch, then they can find themselves with their wide men up against the opposing full-backs. And two versus two in the centre means the game is played in an area where Basle will have numerical control and the ball is kept away from the centre of Bayern's creative trident.

That's to simplify, of course, but if Markus Steinhofer and Park Joo-ho can impose themselves on Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery (assuming they are ever fit at the same time – some combination of Thomas Muller, David Alaba and Ivica Osim if they're not) then Basle have a chance.

If not, Bayern's midfield strength will surely win through. Bastian Schweinsteiger's return from injury is a big plus for Bayern, who should be able to occupy Basle's central duo – whichever two of Granit Xhaka, Adilson Cabral and Benjamin Huggel are selected.

If that happens it could mean Toni Kroos being given dangerous amounts of room to feed the prolific if occasionally wasteful Mario Gomez.

Jonathan Wilson

Storemags

Bayer Leverkusen v Barcelona

BAYER LEVERKUSEN V BARCELONA **FEBRUARY 14** BARCELONA V BAYER LEVERKUSEN **MARCH 7**

Never mind Ballack, injuries worry Leverkusen

As if things weren't hard enough for Bayer Leverkusen ahead of their meeting with defending champions Barcelona, the January transfer window closed with an almighty row between club bosses and star midfielder Michael Ballack (see page 37). That was then compounded by injuries to striker Eren Derdiyok and midfielder Sidney Sam.

Top scorer Derdiyok was ruled out after a domestic accident in which he trod on a shard of glass and required stitches, while Sam injured a thigh muscle in a game against Stuttgart.

Leverkusen beat another Spanish side, Valencia, in the group stages, but face an altogether different test against Pep Guardiola's Barcelona, who have averaged four goals every away game in this season's Champions League.

Leverkusen coach Robin Dutt tried to put a brave face on the draw by making a virtue of the fact that they play the first leg of the last-16 tie at home, saying: "It is an advantage for us to play the first match at home. Barcelona have not won five of their 16 league matches. It is those matches we will examine closely."

Leverkusen have signed Vedran Corluka on loan from Tottenham Hotspur for the rest of season and he could come in at right-back as Dutt re-organises his side to take account of the injuries and likely absence of Ballack.

Barcelona have doubts over Andres Iniesta and Alexis Sanchez, and have lost David Villa, who is out for the season with a broken leg. But they are still likely to prove too strong for Leverkusen.

"The main characteristic of Barcelona is that, although they have lots of stars, they perform as a team"

Leverkusen coach Robin Dutt

Key role...Bender

Main man...Messi

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Barca pose so many problems

How do you stop Barcelona? It's a problem nobody has adequately resolved and, if anything, it's getting harder.

Press high up the pitch, as Shakhtar Donetsk did in the quarter-finals last season, and you might unsettle them, but you risk being caught on the break. Sit deep against them and you face 90 minutes of the ball fizzing around at barely comprehensible speed.

And then there is Lionel Messi and his capacity to beat two defenders in the blink of an eye to rupture even the most disciplined of marking structures.

This season Barcelona's opponents don't even know if they will be facing a back three or four, whether Messi will play as a false nine or orthodox 10, or whether Dani Alves will be deployed as a full-back or a winger.

With Michael Ballack likely to be dropped, Leverkusen coach Dutt is likely to rethink his usual 4-2-3-1. Lars Bender and Andre Schurrle may shift further forward, with defender Stefan Reinartz as an extra deep-lying midfielder. could also play off main striker Stefan Kiessling. Logic says that Barcelona, if they play with a back four, should be vulnerable behind Dani Alves and, while history suggests that his pace and Barca's control of possession tend to negate that, it would be interesting to see what happened if Schurrle stayed high on the Leverkusen left.

Jonathan Wilson

CSKA Moscow v Real Madrid

CSKA MOSCOW V REAL MADRID **FEBRUARY 21** REAL MADRID V CSKA MOSCOW **MARCH 14**

Madrid aiming for seven in a row

Real Madrid were the only team to win all six matches in the autumn group stage and they are aiming for a seventh victory to take them to the quarter-finals. On paper, coach Jose Mourinho should find himself in a strong position going into the business end of the competition, but the Portuguese is battling against mounting criticism, despite a clear lead over Barcelona in La Liga.

The Champions League may provide

Width...Ronaldo

a welcome respite for Mourinho, who has plenty of attacking options and will be confident of progressing.

CSKA finished 2012 in second place in the Russian league before the winter shutdown and a lack of competitive action may count against them. They do, however, have a good record against Spanish opposition and are unbeaten in five encounters. Two years ago CSKA beat Sevilla over two legs in the round of 16 before succumbing to Mourinho's Internazionale in the quarter-finals. Coach Leonid Slutsky is confident, nevertheless, saying: "While it is absolutely impossible to play Barcelona, I believe we can match Madrid. We don't play one of the best teams in the world every day."

Madrid were as inactive in the transfer window as their Russian opponents were busy. With Vagner Love returning to Brazil, CSKA went shopping for reinforcements in Holland, signing Ahmed Musa from VVV Venlo and Pontus Wernbloom from AZ. South Korean midfielder Kim In-sung joined from Gangneung City while a deal to sell Japan international Keisuke Honda to Lazio fell through. Aleksandrs Cauna is a big doubt after breaking a bone in a foot during a training camp in Spain.

> "While it is impossible to play Barca, I believe we can match Madrid. We don't play one of the best teams in the world every day"
>
> **CSKA coach Leonid Slutsky**

Lone striker...Seydou (left)

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Adaptable CSKA will be stretched

Leonid Slutsky is nothing if not flexible, and he used four different formations in his six Champions League group games. Significantly, his two wins, including an away victory over Internazionale, both came playing 4-4-2.

That seems Slutsky's best option to take on Madrid as well, with two banks of four sitting deep, and Alan Dzagoev linking to lone front man Seydou Doumbia. That would probably mean Pavel Mamaev and Yevgeni Aldonin sitting in front of the back four, with Sekou Oliseh on the right and Keisuke Honda coming in for the injured Aleksandrs Cauna on the left.

Barcelona aside, nobody has really worked out how to counter Real Madrid's wealth of attacking options this season. Although they can play 4-3-3, Madrid have used a 4-2-3-1 in all their Champions League games so far this season. It's never easy to predict which permutation they will opt for from their astonishing squad, but it's safe to assume Cristiano Ronaldo will be on the left, which will force Oliseh to drop back and help out his right-back Kirill Nababkin. Mesut Ozil, presumably, will then be charged with finding space between Aldonin and Mamaev. If CSKA do sit deep with two banks of four, the ability of Real Madrid's full-backs, Marcelo in particular, to overlap and maintain width could be vital to outflanking the Russians.

Jonathan Wilson

4-4-2

4-2-3-1

CSKA MOSCOW REAL MADRID

Lyon v APOEL

LYON V APOEL FEBRUARY 14 APOEL V LYON MARCH 7

APOEL take their campaign into the unknown

APOEL are the poster boys for Michel Platini's brave new Champions League, proof that champions of the less-established football nations can make it through to the knockout stage.

Their campaign began back in July when they beat Albanian champions Skenderbeu in the second qualifying round and now, as the first Cypriot side to reach the knockout stage of the competition, they face their toughest test yet, against Lyon.

The French side are not the force they were a few years ago, when they won seven successive league titles and reached the Champions League quarter-finals three years running, from 2004 to 2006, and the semis in 2010. But while they have seen their domestic power eclipsed by Paris Saint-Germain, they have still managed to reach the last 16 of the Champions League for a ninth successive season.

Lyon squeezed into the last 16 with an astonishing 7-1 victory over Dinamo Zagreb in their last group game, a result which raised eyebrows among Europe's betting community even though UEFA declined to investigate, citing no evidence of irregular betting activity.

APOEL added to their squad in the January transfer window with the signing of Portuguese midfielder Helder Sousa from Olympiakos Nicosia. The 34-year-old, who has spent most of his career in the Portuguese lower leagues, cost around £75,000 – a typically low-key signing from the season's surprise team.

Attacking...Cissokho

"What we have to do is show that we deserve to be there"
APOEL coach Ivan Jovanovic

Protection...Maduca (right) is happy to drop deep

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Lyon ready for surprise package

APOEL's system is a simple 4-2-3-1, with the midfield sitting deep, waiting for the chance to spring forward on the counter and supporting the lone forward Ailton.

Coach Ivan Jovanovic has a wealth of options at full-back, with Savvas Poursaitidis, William Boaventura, Athos Solomou and Nektarios Alexandrou all playing at various stages of the group stage. All four are also capable of playing in midfield, but despite their attacking instincts all tend to remain relatively deep – at least in Champions League games.

The holding duo of Helio Pinto and Nuno Morais are mobile, while wide midfielders Gustavo Manduca and Costas Charalambides drop deep, drawing the opposing full-backs forward. That creates room for Ailton, with Ivan Trickovski, the central creator, looking to exploit the space that movement creates.

The away defeat to Real Madrid aside (when they went 4-1-4-1), Lyon also played a 4-2-3-1 in the group stage. Given their full-backs, Anthony Reveillere and Aly Cissokho, are naturally attacking, they must be cautious of Ailton's movement, which probably means Maxime Gonalons taking on an even more defensive role than usual at the back of midfield, with Kim Kallstrom staying deep to make sure Trickovski isn't left untended.

Jonathan Wilson

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Storemags.com

Marseille v Internazionale

MARSEILLE V INTERNAZIONALE **FEBRUARY 22** INTERNAZIONALE V MARSEILLE **MARCH 13**

Revenge mission for Inter boss Ranieri

Claudio Ranieri has revived the fortunes of 2010 champions Internazionale after their disastrous start to the season under Gian Piero Gasperini and has ensured Inter are in the last 16 of the Champions League for the eighth successive season.

In many respects, Inter are still recovering from Jose Mourinho's time in charge of the club and the process of dismantling his squad continued in January with the departure of Thiago Motta to Paris Saint-Germain and the arrivals of Angelo Palombo from Sampdoria and Porto's Fredy Guarin.

Marseille have similarly recovered from a poor early start to the season, but they have been hit by an injury to Cameroonian Stephane Mbia, a powerful figure in central midfield. They are bidding to go beyond the last 16 for the first time since they won the Champions Cup in 1993.

For Ranieri, there is also the chance to gain revenge on Didier Deschamps, his counterpart at Marseille. Back in 2004, the Marseille coach was in charge of the Monaco side that beat Ranieri's Chelsea in the Champions League semis.

"It's an interesting challenge between Inter and Marseille, and between me and Deschamps," said Ranieri. "He got the better of me in 2004 when he was coaching Monaco and I was at Chelsea. Now it's time for me to take revenge.

"The most important thing for Inter will be to be at our peak both physically and psychologically in time for the games, because Inter are not afraid of any team."

"Now it's time for me to take revenge"

Inter coach Claudio Ranieri

Surplus to requirements... Sneijder could miss out

Eye for goal...Remy

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Inter happy to sit deep and counter

Inter were a shambles at the start of the season – a catastrophic mismatch of a coach, Gian Piero Gasperini, who favours a high offside line and a back three, with an ageing and slow back four, resulting in their worst start for half a century.

Claudio Ranieri, though, has opted for a 4-4-2 that brought a string of victories to catapult Inter back into the title race. Athough favouring 4-3-1-2, with Wesley Sneijder in the playmaking role, Ranieri will presumably stick with the 4-4-2 that has brought such success domestically, and that means there may be no place for Sneijder, with Javier Zanetti operating narrow on the right and Ricky Alvarez buzzing in from the left flank ahead of a solid central midfield two.

Marseille have also recovered after a shaky start. Solidity has been their key, with a solid platform at the base of midfield in a 4-2-3-1 that looks rather more creative than results have suggested. A creative three of Morgan Amalfitano, Mathieu Valbuena and Andre Ayew, with Loic Remy roving, has the potential for goals.

Inter will sit deep and look to play on the counter, and the key for them will be whether Alvarez can find space in front of Cesar Azpilicueta. Marseille's left-back, Jeremy Morel, is likely to have plenty of room and could offer an extra body in midfield.

Jonathan Wilson

4-2-3-1

4-4-2

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Milan v Arsenal

MILAN V ARSENAL FEBRUARY 15 ARSENAL V MILAN MARCH 6

Milan looking for end to English hoodoo

Italian champions Milan are looking to end their poor form against English sides, having gone out of the Champions League to English clubs on the last three occasions that they have reached the last 16. Tottenham Hotspur beat them over two legs last season, while Manchester United got the better of them in 2010 and Arsenal won 2-0 in Milan in 2008, followed by a 0-0 draw in the return.

Fantastic form... Van Persie (left)

Milan are likely to put up a stronger case this time around, not least because Arsenal's season has been badly hit by injuries. Arsenal have already seen off Italian opposition this season, however, beating Udinese in the qualifying round, but their fortunes have fluctuated since then. Injuries to young midfielders Jack Wilshere and Alou Diaby, and full-backs Kieran Gibbs, Bacary Sagna and Andre Santos, have taken their toll.

On the plus side, captain Robin Van Persie has been in fantastic goalscoring form, while teenage winger Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain has been an exciting new addition.

Manager Arsene Wenger declined the option to enter the January transfer window for reinforcements, preferring to bide his time and wait for key men to be fit again. "It is a difficult draw but an exciting one," he concedes. "So let's make sure we continue to improve until February. Then we can take our chance with full power and belief."

Milan pulled out of the pursuit of Carlos Tevez, signing another Argentinian striker, Maxi Lopez, instead, but he is likely to start on the bench.

> "We have been in the Champions League for many years and both sides play positive football"
>
> **Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger**

Experience...Mark Van Bommel (right) and Seedorf

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Width the key to getting at Milan

Last season Milan lost at the last-16 stage to a north London club, but the tactical battle will be very different for them this time around. Tottenham Hotspur's pace in wide areas and their sheer energy were what ended up undoing Milan in the San Siro, before an unexpectedly mature display killed the game at White Hart Lane.

Milan have changed little since then. Their 4-3-1-2 set-up remains, which means the two full-backs, Ignazio Abate and Gianluca Zambrotta, are both responsible for providing width and are vulnerable to being exposed.

With Theo Walcott and, perhaps, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Arsenal certainly have the pace in wide areas to threaten Milan, but as Tottenham discovered last season, width is only relevant if you can gain a foothold in the middle. Where Spurs had two in the middle, Arsenal at least have a natural three-man centre, but Clarence Seedorf, drifting between midfield and the forward line, still gives Milan a numerical advantage in that area. Much then, depends on the full-backs – and that is where Arsenal, with Kieran Gibbs, Bacary Sagna and Andre Santos all suffering lengthy injuries, have struggled this season – and whether they can offer extra personnel in midfield. If Arsenal can win enough of the ball, their width could cause problems.

Jonathan Wilson

Napoli v Chelsea

NAPOLI V CHELSEA FEBRUARY 21 CHELSEA V NAPOLI MARCH 14

Villas-Boas fighting to keep Chelsea on track

Impressive...Mata

"We will have to be perfect in London if we want to get through"
Napoli coach Walter Mazzari

Fluid...Cavani

Andre Villas-Boas is gradually making his mark on a Chelsea side which has been dominated by the triumvirate of John Terry, Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard over the past decade. Villas-Boas insists he is not under pressure from owner Roman Abramovich to deliver silverware, but his predecessors – six of them in eight years – all said something similar during previous campaigns.

Nicolas Anelka and Alex were shipped out over the January transfer window, with Bolton Wanderers defender Gary Cahill and Belgian winger Kevin De Bruyne brought in (though De Bruyne was sent back on loan to Genk).

Like Chelsea, Napoli's league campaign has petered out, with the club dropping to seventh in Serie A following 1-1 draws with Bologna and Siena, and a 3-2 away defeat by Genoa. All the Napoli eggs would now appear to be in the Champions League basket.

Eduardo Vargas is an exciting new arrival from Universidad de Chile, but he is likely to start on the bench as coach Walter Mazzari sticks with the players who have made his side so enjoyable to watch.

This will be the first meeting between these two teams in any form of European competition.

"We have the first leg at home, but the return at Stamford Bridge will be decisive in terms of qualification," says Mazzari. "We will have to be perfect in London if we want to get through, that's for sure."

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

The first goal will be crucial

Napoli are such a counter-attacking side that they seem to play better against better sides; in fact, in a mini-league of results against other sides in the top seven at the halfway stage in Serie A, they would be second, having lost only to Roma.

Theirs is a classic back three with a deep-lying midfield four, the wing-backs only occasionally breaking forward to join a fluid front three of Ezequiel Lavezzi, Edinson Cavani and Marek Hamsik – which was supplemented in January by the signing of the prolific right-sided Eduardo Vargas.

Logically, Chelsea's front trio should unsettle Napoli's back three, so do the Italians keep their wing-backs deep and have two spare men at the back, or do they rely on their back three to keep Chelsea's strikers in check?

The danger is that any seeming advantage in that area will be negated by Napoli sitting their midfield four deep, playing three centre-backs against one centre-forward, with a screen of two midfielders.

Although Andre Villas-Boas has accepted that his back four lacks the pace to play as high a line as he would like, the speed of Napoli's front three on the break could expose their sluggishness. The first goal is likely to be crucial. Napoli are not equipped to chase a game but are ideally suited to picking off Chelsea if they have to.

Jonathan Wilson

3-4-3

4-3-3

NAPOLI CHELSEA

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Zenit v Benfica

ZENIT V BENFICA FEBRUARY 15 BENFICA V ZENIT MARCH 6

Zenit face Portuguese opposition again

Russian league leaders Zenit, having seen off Portuguese opposition in the group stage in the shape of Europa League winners Porto, face more Iberian opponents in the last 16 of the Champions League. And Benfica, the current Portuguese league leaders, are likely to prove a tougher nut to crack.

Zenit finished 2011 as "winter champions", with the Russian league now carrying on through the spring as it falls into line with other European league timetables, and Zenit face the disadvantage of not having played a competitive match since mid-December.

Zenit coach Luciano Spalletti has total confidence in his side, however, saying: "I believe that finishing the year at the top of the league and qualifying for the Champions League knockout phase was the maximum we could have achieved. The players fully deserve this, they have been doing their best for the whole year".

Benfica, twice winners of the European Cup, outshone Porto in the autumn and surprisingly topped their Champions League group, finishing ahead of Manchester United, who they held to home and away draws.

It was the first time that Benfica had finished first in a Champions League group stage since 1995.

Nicolas Gaitan was one of the stars of the group phase with displays that led to the Argentinian being linked with a high-profile transfer to, among others, United. His fellow countryman Pablo Aimar has also been enjoying a new lease of life in Lisbon.

Creative...Aimar

"The players fully deserve this, they have been doing their best for the whole year"

Zenit coach Luciano Spalletti

Holding midfielder...Denisov

THE TACTICAL BATTLE

Individual battles will be key

Zenit's basic system is a 4-3-3, but with Danny, who plays on the left of the front three, operating as a playmaker and drifting in behind the lone striker. Normally this would be Aleksandr Kerzhakov, but injury means Aleksandr Bukharov may play.

Viktor Fayzulin tends to tuck in on the right, meaning the only real width comes from Aleksandr Anyukov, the attack-minded right-back. The midfield three is all about balance: Igor Denisov holds, the experienced Konstantin Zyryanov keeps the ball moving, while Roman Shirokov roams freely, frequently arriving late in the opposition box.

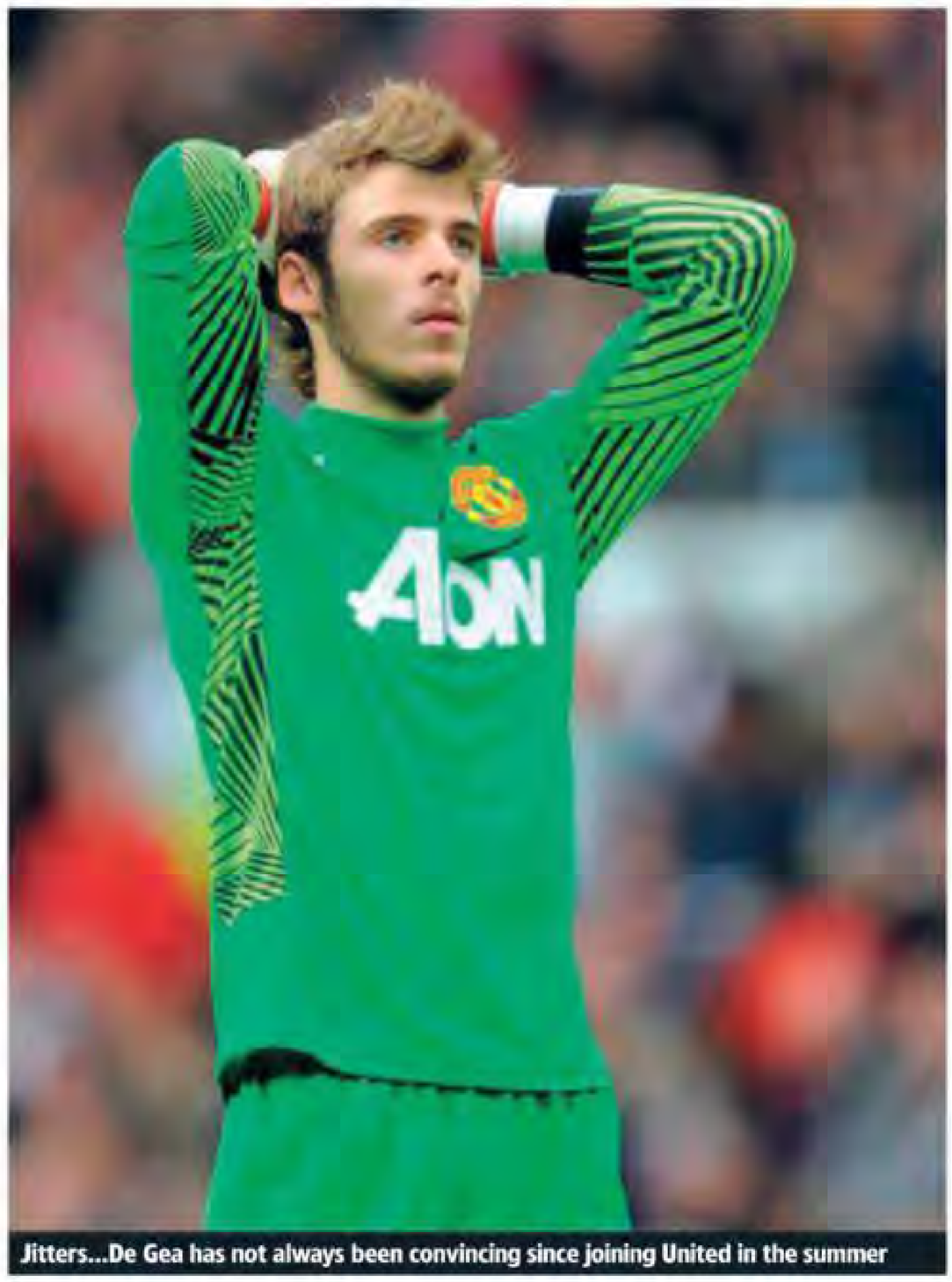
Benfica were flexible in the group stage, but they only played with a front two against Otelul Galati. The likelihood is a 4-2-3-1 with Rodrigo as the lone forward, and Pablo Aimar flanked by Nicolas Gaitan and Bruno Cesar, and Axel Witsel.

It looks finely balanced, and a number of individual battles will be key. Can Aimar find room to create with Denisov sitting on him? Can Anyukov provide width or will Cesar pose too much of an attacking threat? And will Alvaro Pereira, Benfica's Uruguayan right-back, be able to dominate Danny? That would then leave Javi Garcia to try to pick up those late runs of Shirokov which were, in the end, what undid Shakhtar Donetsk in the group stage.

Jonathan Wilson

EUROPA LEAGUE
Big names enter the fray

Nick Bidwell previews the round of 32 in UEFA's second cup competition


Jitters...De Gea has not always been convincing since joining United in the summer

AJAX v MANCHESTER UNITED

Neither of these ex-continental champions are in robust health at the moment, still hung-over from failing to qualify for the knockout phase of the Champions League. Plagued by injuries to key men such as captain and centre-back Nemanja Vidic, and box-to-box player Darren Fletcher, United are lacking in both central midfield and goal, where new Spanish keeper David De Gea has looked terribly jittery. Ajax's Achilles heel is their defence, their vulnerability to the ball over the top and too many instances of miscommunication. Interestingly, coach Frank De Boer is toying with a new 3-3-1-3 formation.

LAZIO v ATLETICO MADRID

Atletico have looked a tougher nut to crack since ex-skipper Diego Simeone took over as coach in mid-term from Gregorio Manzano. Much more aggressive in all areas of the pitch – some would say excessively so – the "*Colchoneros*" are now relying on a counter-attacking strategy, and in prolific Colombian striker Radamel Falcao they have the sort of arch-opportunist every catenaccio-inspired team dreams of. As proved by their recent victory in Serie A over Milan, Lazio can live with the best, though from time to time they are not immune from collective wipe-outs. Evergreen German striker Miroslav Klose is their trump card and could be joined up front by new Uruguayan recruit Emiliano Alfaro.

AZ v ANDERLECHT

No Benelux duel is ever short of passion and this one should be no exception. AZ, UEFA Cup runners-up in 1981, form an attractive, well-drilled and physically strong unit under coach Gertjan Verbeek and, while it is true they could dearly use a dyed-in-the-wool penalty box predator, they have a far from insignificant goal threat from midfield in Rasmus Elm. Belgian league leaders Anderlecht will, as usual, be banking on the finishing abilities of Matias Suarez, Guillaume Gillet and Milan Jovanovic.

Hit man...midfielder Elm is a goal threat

PORTO v MANCHESTER CITY**

It would be an understatement to say that Europa League holders Porto have a lot riding on this tie. Their surprise exit from the Champions League in December and the fact that they are currently playing second-fiddle to Benfica in the domestic championship has heaped pressure on coach Vitor Pereira and the longer he can go in this competition, the safer he will feel. In a bid to enliven their campaign, Porto brought in an old favourite during the transfer window, Argentine midfielder Lucho Gonzalez returning on a free from Marseille. With City more concerned with claiming their first English league title in 44 years, the question is will they go all out?

SALZBURG v METALIST KHARKIV

The Austrians have the ambition but not the strength in depth. Metalist possess a clear edge in midfield, where the South American duo of Cleiton Xavier (Brazil) and Jose Ernesto Sosa (Argentina) reign.

RUBIN KAZAN v OLYMPIAKOS*

The midwinter departure of Ecuadorian midfield hub Cristian Noboa to Dynamo Moscow was a major blow to Rubin. Former Manchester United goalkeeper Roy Carroll is the new man between the Olympiakos posts, having joined from Crete.

Back...Gonzalez returns to Porto, having been sold to Marseille in June 2009

*First legs to be played February 16, except * to be played February 14*
*Second legs on February 23 except **, to be played February 22*

Impressive...Radovic has been in fine form

LEGIA WARSAW v SPORTING LISBON
Serb winger Miroslav Radovic is the player in form for Legia, who went into the winter break second in the Polish league. Meanwhile, Sporting continue to swear by their attacking tandem of Dutch starlet Ricky Van Wolfswinkel and Diego Capel of Spain.

Threat...Canales, who is on loan from Real Madrid, could cause trouble for Stoke

STEAUA BUCHAREST v TWENTE
Steve McClaren's mid-season re-appointment as Twente coach already has the Dutch side looking more solid and tactically refined. The metamorphosis of the Argentinian Pablo Brandan from defender into classy playmaker is a boost for Steaua.

Transformation...Steaua's Brandan has been switched from a defensive role to playmaker

VIKTORIA PLZEN v SCHALKE
The word is that after taking Viktoria into the Champions League this season, coach Pavel Vrba is looking to moving on. A Schalke forward line of Raul and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar should prove too hot to handle.

WISLA KRAKOW v STANDARD LIEGE
A Wisla squad of multiple cultures – they boast no fewer than 12 different nationalities – know what their top priority has to be against "*Les Rouches*": find a way to stop the quick and cunning Standard striker Mohammed Tchite.

HANOVER v CLUB BRUGGE
Two sides who make a little go a very long way. A great chance for Club Brugge's German coach Christoph Daum to prove to his compatriots that he is not yesterday's man.

STOKE CITY v VALENCIA
The English team's direct and physical style could prove a nightmare to their Spanish opponents. Conversely, the technical brilliance of Valencia midfielder Sergio Canales may be Stoke's undoing.

TRABZONSPOR v PSV EINDHOVEN
For all the Black Sea outfit's grit and togetherness, PSV appear to have too many weapons, particularly in the attacking-third with the Swedish-Belgian combo of Ola Toivonen and Dries Mertens.

On fire...Di Natale is always a danger

UDINESE v PAOK
Easy to distil this Italo-Greek encounter into a battle of the star names: Udinese's free-scoring Antonio Di Natale and PAOK's fast-improving creator-in-chief Georgios Georgiadis.

SPORTING BRAGA v BESIKTAS*
The acquisition of Portugal midfielder Ruben Amorim on loan from Benfica should help Braga no end, although they cannot, in their heart of hearts, expect to repeat their Europa League runners-up spot of last season. Portugal schemer Manuel Fernandes is Besiktas' key player.

LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW v ATHLETIC BILBAO
The Muscovite Railwaymen recently signalled their intent with the £8million purchase of Russia's national team striker Roman Pavlyuchenko from Tottenham Hotspur. The Basques will counter as only they know how: with local boys and a furious, risk-taking attacking game. WS

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ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2011

European Sports Media

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

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World Soccer (England)

SEASON RANKING

Cummulative votes through the season (total votes cast in September, October and November 2011)

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	15 votes
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	9
Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)	8
Joe Hart (Manchester City)	4
Tim Krul (Newcastle United)	2
Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	2
Massimiliano Benassi (Lecce)	1
Thibaut Courtois (Atletico Madrid)	1
Pepe Reina (Liverpool)	1
Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (B M'gladbach)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1
Javi Varas (Sevilla)	1
Tolga Zengin (Trabzonspor)	1
Ron-Robert Zieler (Hanover)	1

DEFENDERS

Dani Alves (Barcelona	18
Vincent Kompany (Manchester City)	16
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	9
Thiago Silva (Milan)	9
Daniel Van Buyten (Bayern Munich)	9
Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich)	7
Patrice Evra (Manchester United)	7
Stefan Lichtsteiner (Juventus)	6
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	6
Carles Puyol (Barcelona)	5
Phil Jones (Manchester United)	5
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich)	4
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	3
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	3
John Terry (Chelsea)	4
Nemanja Vidic (Manchester United)	4
Eric Abidal (Barcelona)	2
Daniel Agger (Liverpool)	2
Andre Santos (Arsenal)	2
Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United)	2
Ledley King (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Lucio (Internazionale)	2
Rafinha (Bayern Munich)	2
Micah Richards (Manchester City)	2
Marcel Schmelzer (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Thomas Vermaelen (Arsenal)	2
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Andrea Barzagli (Juventus)	1
Henri Bedimo (Montpellier)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Jose Bosingwa (Chelsea)	1
Ricardo Carvalho (Real Madrid)	1
Fabio Coentrao (Real Madrid)	1
Dante (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid)	1
Jose Enrique (Liverpool)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City)	1
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	1
Joleon Lescott (Manchester City)	1
Diego Lugano (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Maicon (Internazionale)	1
Michel Bastos (Lyon)	1
Nicolas Nkoulou (Marseille)	1
Kyriakos Papadopoulos (Schalke)	1
Paulo Jorge (APOEL)	1
Pepe (Real Madrid)	1
Alvaro Pereira (Porto)	1
Lukasz Pisczek (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Adil Rami (Valencia)	1
Martin Skrtel (Liverpool)	1
Chris Smalling (Manchester United)	1
Nicolas Spolli (Catania)	1
Ron Vlaar (Feyenoord)	1
Kyle Walker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Javier Zanetti (Internazionale)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Xavi (Barcelona)	22
Marco Reus (Borussia Monchengladbach)	9
David Silva (Manchester City)	9
Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid)	8
Andrea Pirlo (Juventus)	8
Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)	8
Gareth Bale (Tottenham Hotspur)	7
Cesc Fabregas (Barcelona)	7
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	6
Nani (Manchester United)	5
Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich)	4
Mario Gotze (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Javier Pastore (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Kevin-Prince Boateng (Milan)	3
Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich)	3
Alex Song (Arsenal)	3
Pablo Aimar (Benfica)	2
Sergio Buquets (Barcelona)	2
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	2
Shinji Kagawa (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Claudio Marchisio (Juventus)	2
Yaya Toure (Manchester City)	2
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	2
Charlie Adam (Liverpool)	1
Michael Carrick (Manchester United)	1
Patrick Herrmann (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
Kaka (Real Madrid)	1
Frank Lampard (Chelsea)	1
Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli)	1
Dries Mertens (PSV Eindhoven)	1
Jon Obi Mikel (Chelsea)	1
Samir Nasri (Manchester City)	1
Park Ji-sung (Manchester United)	1
Scott Parker (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Simone Pepe (Juventus)	1
Ramires (Chelsea)	1
Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Theo Walcott (Arsenal)	1
Granit Xhaka (Basle)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	39
Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)	27
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	24
Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)	12
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	6
Juan Mata (Chelsea)	6
Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)	5
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)	4
Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)	3
Alexis Sanchez (Barcelona)	3
Roberto Soldado (Valencia)	3
Mario Balotelli (Manchester City)	2
Edinson Cavani (Napoli)	2
Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)	2
Demba Ba (Newcastle United)	1
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	1
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)	1
Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)	1
Miroslav Klose (Lazio)	1
Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Alessandro Matri (Juventus)	1
Diego Milito (Internazionale)	1
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	1
Raul (Schalke)	1
Francesco Totti (Roma)	1

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ALBANIA

Tueta target title

Tueta Durres restart the Superliga season five points clear of Tirana, with coach Hasan Lika looking to win the club's first championship since 1994.

Although they have suffered just one defeat in 13 league games, Tueta scored only 17 goals and they have added to their firepower with the signing of Serbian forward Pavle Delibasic, who becomes the only non-Albanian in the squad.

BELGIUM

Suarez is the best

Anderlecht striker Matias Suarez won the Golden Boot for the most valuable player in the Belgian league last year.

Ban...Balotelli (left) with Parker

ENGLAND

Balotelli banned

Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli was banned for four matches after he stamped on Tottenham Hotspur's Scott Parker in his side's 3-2 Premier League victory. Referee Howard Webb missed the incident and the Italian, who had appeared as a 65th-minute substitute, went on to score an injury-time winner from the penalty spot.

In the first game of Balotelli's suspension, City drew 2-2 at Liverpool in the League Cup semi-finals, but lost 3-2 on aggregate. Liverpool, who will play in their first Wembley Final for 16 years, now meet Cardiff City, who beat fellow Championship side Crystal Palace on penalties.

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round draw

Basle (Swi) v Bayern Munich (Ger) (Feb 22 & Mar 13)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) v Barcelona (Spa) (Feb 14 & Mar 7)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) v Real Madrid (Spa) (Feb 21 & Mar 14)
Lyon (Fra) v APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) (Feb 14 & Mar 7)
Marseille (Fra) v Internazionale (Ita) (Feb 22 & Mar 13)
Milan (Ita) v Arsenal (Eng) (Feb 15 & Mar 6)
Napoli (Ita) v Chelsea (Eng) (Feb 21 & Mar 14)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) v Benfica (Por) (Feb 15 & Mar 6)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round draw

● *The 8 3rd-placed teams from the Champions League group stage (marked ^) entered at this stage*

Ajax^(Hol) v Manchester United^(Eng)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) v Anderlecht (Blg)
Braga (Por) v Besiktas (Tur)*
Hanover (Ger) v Club Brugge (Blg)
Lazio (Ita) v Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) v Athletic Bilbao (Spa)
Porto^(Por) v Manchester City^(Eng)**
Rubin Kazan (Rus) v Olympiakos^(Gre)*
Salzburg (Aut) v Metalist Kharkiv (Ukr)
Steaua Bucharest (Rom) v Twente Enschede (Hol)
Stoke City (Eng) v Valencia^(Spa)
Trabzonspor^(Tur) v PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
Udinese (Ita) v PAOK Salonika (Gre)
Viktoria Plzen^(Cze) v Schalke (Ger)
Wisla Krakow (Pol) v Standard Liege (Blg)

*1st legs - Feb 16 (*Feb 14); 2nd legs - Feb 23 (**Feb 22)*

BELGIUM

Regular season

Jan 14: Standard 6 Beerschot 1; St Truiden 0 Kortrijk 0; OH Leuven 1 Lokeren 1; Mechelen 4 Mons 1; Lierse 2 Gent 1; Cercle Brugge 3 Westerlo 1.
Jan 15: Anderlecht 3 Club Brugge 0; Zulte Waregem 1 Genk 1.
Jan 20: Genk 2 St Truiden 1.
Jan 21: Kortrijk 0 Anderlecht 1; Beerschot 4 Cercle Brugge 0; Club Brugge 0 Mechelen 1; Gent 0 Zulte Waregem 0; Lokeren 2 Lierse 0; Mons 2 OH Leuven 2.
Jan 22: Westerlo 0 Standard 0.
Jan 24: Anderlecht 3 Gent 1.
Jan 25: Club Brugge 3 Lokeren 0; St Truiden 0 Westerlo 3; Zulte Waregem 1 Beerschot 0; OH Leuven 0 Kortrijk 2; Mechelen 3 Genk 2; Lierse 2 Cercle Brugge 2.
Jan 26: Standard 2 Mons 1.
Jan 28: Beerschot 0 Anderlecht 0; Genk 5 OH Leuven 0; Gent 6 St Truiden 0; Lokeren 3 Mechelen 2; Kortrijk 0 Zulte Waregem 0; Westerlo 0 Lierse 2.
Jan 29: Cercle B'ge 0 Standard 1; Mons 0 Club B'ge 2.

BELGIUM – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	23	15	5	3	44	19	50
Gent	23	13	4	6	50	25	43
Club Brugge	23	13	4	6	37	25	43
Standard	23	11	8	4	32	25	41
Kortrijk	23	11	5	7	28	22	38
Genk	23	10	7	6	46	31	37
Cercle Brugge	23	9	7	7	29	28	34
Mechelen	23	8	6	9	34	41	30
Beerschot	23	7	8	8	34	33	29
Mons	23	7	7	9	39	42	28
Lokeren	23	6	9	8	31	34	27
Lierse	23	5	9	9	20	30	24
OH Leuven	23	5	7	11	27	44	22
Z Waregem	23	3	12	8	21	29	21
Westerlo	23	4	5	14	21	39	17
St Truiden	23	2	7	14	25	51	13

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 enter championship play-offs, 7th to 14th enter Europa League place play-offs, 15th & 16th (bottom 2) enter relegation play-off (1 of them will go down)

CYPRUS

Regular season

Jan 7: Ethnikos 2 Ermis 1; Apollon 1 Anagennisi 0; Nea Salamina 0 Anorthosis 3; Olympiakos 1 AEK 1.
Jan 8: ENP 0 AEL 4; Alki 2 APOEL 1.
Jan 9: Omonia 3 Aris 0.
Jan 14: AEL 0 Omonia 3; Anagennisi 0 Ethnikos 0; Anorthosis 1 ENP 0.
Jan 15: Aris 1 Alki 1; AEK 1 Apollon 1; Ermis 2 Nea Salamina 2.
Jan 16: APOEL 0 Olympiakos 0.
Jan 21: Omonia 0 Anorthosis 1; Aris 0 APOEL 1.
Jan 22: Nea Salamina 5 Anagennisi 2; Alki 1 AEL 2; Apollon 2 Olympiakos 0.
Jan 23: Ethnikos 1 AEK 0.
Jan 27: Anorthosis 0 Alki 0.
Jan 28: Anagennisi 0 ENP 2; Olympiakos 1 Ethnikos 1; Ermis 0 Omonia 2; AEL 1 Aris 0.
Jan 29: APOEL 2 Apollon 1; AEK 6 Nea Salamina 0.

CYPRUS – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia	18	12	4	2	32	10	40
AEL	18	12	4	2	23	7	40
APOEL	18	12	3	3	29	8	39
Anorthosis	18	11	5	2	22	7	38
AEK	18	7	7	4	24	14	28
Apollon	18	6	2	8	21	23	26
Nea Salamina	18	6	5	7	23	32	23
Ethnikos	18	5	6	7	12	15	21
Alki	18	6	3	9	20	29	21
Olympiakos	18	4	7	7	17	24	19
ENP	17	5	3	9	11	16	18
Aris	18	3	6	9	14	23	15
Anagennisi	18	1	5	12	12	32	8
Ermis	17	1	4	12	8	28	7

26-round regular season (13x2); top 4 will form championship group, 5th to 8th will form "placement" group, 9th to 12th will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down), 13th & 14th (bottom 2) will be relegated automatically

ENGLAND

Tuesday, January 3

Manchester City 3 (Aguero 10, Y Toure 33, Milner pen 75)
Liverpool 0 Att: 47,131

Tottenham 1 (Defoe 63)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 36,062

Wigan 1 (Rodallega 62)
Sunderland 4 (Gardner 45+4, McClean 55, Sessegnon 73, Vaughan 80) Att: 15,871

Wednesday, January 4

Everton 1 (Howard 63)
Bolton 2 (Ngog 67, Cahill 78) Att: 29,561

Newcastle 3 (Ba 33, Cabaye 47, Jones og 90)
Manchester United 0 Att: 52,299

Wednesday, January 11

Tottenham 2 (Lennon 35, Assou-Ekotto 63)
Everton 0 Att: 36,132

Saturday, January 14

Aston Villa 1 (Bent 56)
Everton 1 (Anichebe 69) Att: 31,853

Blackburn 3 (Gamst Pedersen 45+4, Dunn 46, Formica 79)
Fulham 1 (Duff 56) Att: 18,003

Chelsea 1 (Lampard 13)
Sunderland 0 Att: 41,696

Liverpool 0
Stoke 0 Att: 44,691

Manchester United 3 (Scholes 45+1, Welbeck 74, Carrick 83)
Bolton 0 Att: 75,444

Tottenham 1 (Modric 51)
Wolverhampton 1 (Fletcher 22) Att: 36,194

West Bromwich 1 (Long pen 68)
Norwich 2 (Surman 43, Morison 79) Att: 22,474

Sunday, January 15

Newcastle 1 (Best 37)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 49,865

Swansea 3 (Sinclair pen 16, Dyer 57, Graham 70)
Arsenal 2 (Van Persie 5, Walcott 69) Att: 20,409

Monday, January 16

Wigan 0
Manchester City 1 (Dzeko 22) Att: 16,026

Saturday, January 21

Bolton 3 (M Davies 4, Reo-Coker 29, Steinsson 50)
Liverpool 1 (Bellamy 37) Att: 26,854

Everton 1 (Cahill 24)
Blackburn 1 (Goodwillie 72) Att: 32,464

Fulham 5 (Murphy pen 52, Dempsey 59, 65, 89, Zamora pen 68)
Newcastle 2 (Guthrie 43, Ben Arfa 85) Att: 25,692

Norwich 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 26,792

Queens Park Rangers 3 (Helguson pen 33, Buzsaky 45, Smith 81)
Wigan 1 (Rodallega 66) Att: 16,002

Stoke 1 (Jerome 86)
West Bromwich 2 (Morrison 35, Dorrans 90+1) Att: 26,865

Sunderland 2 (Sessegnon 14, Gardner 85)
Swansea 0 Att: 36,904

Wolverhampton 2 (Kightly 21, Edwards 31)
Aston Villa 3 (Bent pen 11, Keane 51, 84) Att: 27,084

Sunday, January 22

Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 71)
Manchester United 2 (Valencia 45+1, Welbeck 81) Att: 60,093

Manchester City 3 (Nasri 56, Lescott 59, Balotelli pen 90+5)
Tottenham 2 (Defoe 60, Bale 65) Att: 47,422

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	22	17	3	2	60	18	54
Man United	22	16	3	3	54	21	51
Tottenham	22	14	4	4	41	24	46
Chelsea	22	12	5	5	40	25	41
Arsenal	22	11	3	8	39	33	36
Newcastle	22	10	6	6	32	30	36
Liverpool	22	9	8	5	25	21	35
Stoke	22	8	6	8	23	33	30
Norwich	22	7	8	7	32	36	29
Sunderland	22	7	6	9	29	24	27
Aston Villa	22	6	9	7	26	29	27
Fulham	22	6	8	8	28	31	26
Swansea	22	6	8	8	23	27	26
Everton	22	7	5	10	22	26	26
West Brom	22	7	4	11	22	31	25
QPR	22	5	5	12	22	37	20
Bolton	22	6	1	15	28	47	19
Blackburn	22	4	6	12	33	45	18
Wolves	22	4	6	12	25	40	18
Wigan	22	3	6	13	19	45	15

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

19 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)
15 Demba Ba (Newcastle)
14 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
13 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
12 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Blackburn)
11 Edin Dzeko (Manchester City)

FA CUP

Last 64

Jan 6: Liverpool 5 Oldham 1.
Jan 7: Barnsley 2 Swansea 4; Birmingham 0 Wolverhampton 0; Brighton 1 Wrexham 1; Bristol Rovers 1 Aston Villa 3; Coventry 1 Southampton 2; Crawley 1 Bristol City 0; Dagenham & Redbridge 0 Millwall 0; Derby 1 Crystal Palace 0; Doncaster 0 Notts County 2; Everton 2 Tamworth 0; Fleetwood 1 Blackpool 5; Fulham 4 Charlton 0; Gillingham 1 Stoke 3; Hull 3 Ipswich 1; Macclesfield 2 Bolton 2; Middlesbrough 1 Shrewsbury 0; Milton Keynes Dons 1 Queens Park Rangers 1; Newcastle 2 Blackburn 1; Norwich 4 Burnley 1; Nottingham Forest 0 Leicester 0; Reading 0 Stevenage 1; Sheffield United 3 Salisbury 1; Swindon 2 Wigan 1; Tottenham 3 Cheltenham 0; Watford 4 Bradford City 2; West Bromwich 4 Cardiff 2.
Jan 8: Chelsea 4 Portsmouth 0; Manchester City 2 Manchester United 3; Peterborough 0 Sunderland 2; Sheffield Wednesday 1 West Ham 0.
Jan 9: Arsenal 1 Leeds 0.

FRANCE

Disaster anniversary

There will be no matches, either professional or amateur, played in France on May 5 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Furiani stadium disaster. In 1992, a stand collapsed before the start of a French Cup game between Bastia and Marseille, killing 18 people and injuring some 2,400.

Dismissed...coach Garcia

GEORGIA

Coach pays the price

Dynamo Tbilisi, who were third in the league before the season restarted in February, sacked Spanish coach Alex Garcia after a series of friendly defeats during the winter break.

The former Barcelona assistant joined Georgia's 13-time champions in June last year, but saw his side fail to qualify for the Europa League group stage and suffer a disappointing defeat in the last 16 of the Georgia Cup.

HOLLAND

Kids see AZ win

AZ Alkmaar beat Ajax 3-2 in Amsterdam, watched by around 20,000 children, in the quarter-finals of the Dutch Cup. Attendance was restricted to under-12s after the original game had been abandoned shortly before half-time when an Ajax supporter attacked the visitors' goalkeeper, Esteban Alvarado. Maarten Martens, Charlison Benschop and Rasmus Elm were on target for AZ, with Siem de Jong scoring twice for the hosts.

Feyenoord's 19-year-old striker John Guidetti, who is on a season-long loan from

Replays
Jan 17: Bolton 2 Macclesfield 0; Leicester 4 Nottingham Forest 0; Millwall 5 Dagenham & Redbridge 0; Queens Park Rangers 1 Milton Keynes Dons 0.
Jan 18: Wolverhampton 0 Birmingham 1; Wrexham 1 Brighton 1 (aet, Brighton 5-4 on pens).

Last 32
Jan 27: Everton 2 Fulham 1; Watford 0 Tottenham 1.
Jan 28: Blackpool 1 Sheffield Wednesday 1; Bolton 2 Swansea 1; Brighton 1 Newcastle 0; Derby 0 Stoke 2; Hull 0 Crawley 1; Leicester 2 Swindon 0; Liverpool 2 Manchester United 1; Millwall 1 Southampton 1; Queens Park Rangers 0 Chelsea 1; Sheffield United 0 Birmingham 4; Stevenage 1 Notts County 0; West Bromwich 1 Norwich 2.
Jan 29: Arsenal 3 Aston Villa 2; Sunderland 1 Middlesbrough 1.

Last 16 draw
Chelsea v Birmingham; Crawley v Stoke; Everton v *Blackpool OR Sheffield Wednesday*; Liverpool v Brighton; *Millwall OR Southampton* v Bolton; Norwich v Leicester; Stevenage v Tottenham; *Sunderland OR Middlesbrough* v Arsenal
Games to be played Feb 18/19

FRANCE

Saturday, January 14
Ajaccio 2 (Eduardo 27, Diawara 33)
Auxerre 1 (Oliech 13) Att: 5,522

Bordeaux 2 (Jussie 7, Maurice-Belay 12)
Valenciennes 1 (Kadir 54) Att: 16,274

Brest 1 (Ben Basat 6)
Nice 0 Att: 12,003

Caen 0
Rennes 2 (Kembo 22, Montano 65) Att: 14,785

Dijon 3 (Corgnet 42, Jovial 50, 56)
Evian 1 (Sagbo 76) Att: 12,565

Montpellier 1 (Giroud 62)
Lyon 0 Att: 18,889

Nancy 2 (Moukandjo 14, Sane 83)
Lorient 2 (Coutadeur 62, Campbell 81) Att: 13,500

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Nene 38, 68, Pastore 56)
Toulouse 1 (Braaten 88) Att: 44,688

Saint-Etienne 1 (Zouma 77)
Sochaux 0 Att: 20,222

Sunday, January 15
Marseille 2 (Remy 61, 83)
Lille 0 Att: 41,279

Saturday, January 28
Auxerre 1 (Cisse 81)
Nancy 3 (Mollo 68, Niculae 69, 78) Att: 10,815

Brest 0
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Bisevac 6) Att: 14,763

Lille 3 (Hazard pen 50, Roux 86, 87)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 17,437

Lorient 1 (Romao 63)
Sochaux 1 (Bakambu 80) Att: 15,563

Lyon 3 (Briand 8, Gomis 82, Lacazette 90+1)
Dijon 1 (Sankhare 61) Att: 35,649

Nice 0
Montpellier 1 (Giroud 90) Att: 7,099

Toulouse 1 (Riviere 35)
Caen 0 Att: 12,023

Sunday, January 29
Evian 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 11,543

Rennes 1 (Doumbia 15)
Marseille 2 (Apam og 44, Cheyrou 77) Att: 28,802

Valenciennes 1 (Aboubakar 47)
Ajaccio 2 (Eduardo 6, Kinkela 90+2) Att: 13,515

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	21	14	4	3	35	18	46
Montpellier	21	13	4	4	41	23	43
Lille	21	10	9	2	36	21	39
Lyon	21	12	2	7	34	23	38
Marseille	21	10	7	4	31	19	37
Rennes	21	10	5	6	32	25	35
Toulouse	21	9	7	5	22	20	34
Saint-Etienne	21	9	6	6	24	24	33
Bordeaux	21	6	9	6	22	23	27
Lorient	21	6	8	7	21	24	26
Brest	21	4	12	5	20	20	24
Evian	21	5	8	8	28	32	23
Nancy	21	5	7	9	22	29	22
Dijon	21	6	4	11	24	39	22
Ajaccio	21	5	6	10	24	38	21
Valenciennes	21	5	5	11	20	25	20
Caen	21	5	5	11	24	32	20
Auxerre	21	4	7	10	28	35	19
Sochaux	21	4	7	10	22	36	19
Nice	21	4	6	11	21	25	18

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers
15 Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)
9 Kevin Gameiro (Paris Saint-Germain)
9 Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)
9 Loic Remy (Marseille)

FRENCH CUP

Last 32
Jan 20: Sable 0 Paris Saint-Germain 4.
Jan 21: Auxerre 1 Chateauroux 2; Bourg-Peronnas 3 AC Ajaccio 2 (aet); Compiegne 0 Lille 1 (aet); Creteil-Lusitanos 2 Bordeaux 2 (aet, Bordeaux 4-3 on pens); Dijon 2 Istres 1; Limoges 0 Drancy 2; Nice 0 Rennes 0 (aet, Rennes 5-4 on pens); Niort 1 Orleans 2; Quevilly 1 Angers 0; Valence 0 Evian 2.
Jan 22: GFCO Ajaccio 1 Troyes 0; Lucon 0 Lyon 2; Marseille 3 Le Havre 1 (aet); Valenciennes 3 Bastia 1.
Jan 23: Tours 0 Montpellier 1.

GERMANY

Friday, January 20
Monchengladbach 3 (Reus 11, Herrmann 41, 71)
Bayern Munich 1 (Schweinsteiger 76) Att: 54,047

Saturday, January 21
Freiburg 1 (Ginter 88)
Augsburg 0 Att: 19,600

1899 Hoffenheim 0
Hanover 0 Att: 24,800

Kaiserslautern 0
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 40,381

Nuremberg 2 (Esswein 43, Maroh 85)
Hertha 0 Att: 39,117

Schalke 3 (Matip 3, Papadopoulos 57, Draxler 80)
Stuttgart 1 (Okazaki 87) Att: 61,673

Wolfsburg 1 (Polter 78)
Cologne 0 Att: 27,057

Sunday, January 22
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Pospech og 10, Friedrich 35, Bender 70)
Mainz 2 (Polanski 50, Caligiuri 53) Att: 24,365

Hamburg 1 (Guerrero 86)
Borussia Dortmund 5 (Grosskreutz 16, Lewandowski 37, 83, Blaszczykowski 58, pen 76) Att: 57,000

Friday, January 27
Hanover 1 (Abdellaoue 18)
Nuremberg 0 Att: 35,400

Saturday, January 28
Augsburg 2 (De Jong 5, Hain 65)
Kaiserslautern 2 (Dick 25, 48) Att: 30,028

Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 60, Robben 90+2)
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 69,000

Borussia Dortmund 3 (Kagawa 16, 55, Grosskreutz 31)
1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Johnson 63) Att: 80,500

Cologne 1 (Podolski 4)
Schalke 4 (Marica 60, 72, Huntelaar pen 78, Hoger 82) Att: 50,000

Hertha 1 (Lasogga 81)
Hamburg 2 (Jansen 24, Petric 45+1) Att: 49,168

Werder Bremen 1 (Pizarro 29)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Reinartz 57) Att: 40,060

Sunday, January 29
Mainz 3 (Choupo-Moting 3, 17, Polanski pen 6)
Freiburg 1 (Krmas 68) Att: 30,938

Stuttgart 0
Monchengladbach 3 (Hanke 31, Reus 81, De Camargo 84) Att: 53,600

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	19	13	1	5	46	13	40
Dortmund	19	12	4	3	43	14	40
Schalke	19	13	1	5	45	24	40
M'gladbach	19	12	3	4	31	12	39
Werder	19	9	4	6	31	32	31
Leverkusen	19	8	6	5	26	25	30
Hanover	19	6	9	4	21	24	27
Hoffenheim	19	6	5	8	20	22	23
Wolfsburg	19	7	2	10	24	36	23
Stuttgart	19	6	4	9	24	26	22
Hamburg	19	5	7	7	24	33	22
Mainz	19	5	6	8	27	33	21
Nuremberg	19	6	3	10	19	29	21
Cologne	19	6	3	10	28	40	21
Hertha	19	4	8	7	25	30	20
Kaiserslautern	19	3	9	7	15	23	18
Augsburg	19	3	7	9	17	31	16
Freiburg	19	4	4	11	23	42	16

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd-bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading scorers
17 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
16 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)
15 Lukas Podolski (Cologne)
14 Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)
13 Claudio Pizarro (Werder Bremen)
12 Marco Reus (Monchengladbach)

GREECE

Jan 3: Giannina 0 OFI 0; Panionios 2 Asteras 0; AEK 0 Doxa 0.
Jan 4: Kerkyra 1 Aris 0; Ergotelis 1 Xanthi 2; PAOK 3 Levadiakos 1; Panetolikos 1 Panathinaikos 1; Olympiakos 1 Atromitos 0.
Jan 7: Asteras 1 Panetolikos 0; Ergotelis 1 Panionios 0; Levadiakos 0 AEK 2.
Jan 8: Xanthi 0 PAOK 0; Aris 1 Giannina 0; Atromitos 2 OFI 0; Panathinaikos 1 Kerkyra 0; Doxa 0 Olympiakos 0.
Jan 14: AEK 1 Xanthi 1; OFI 2 Doxa 0; Olympiakos 3 Levadiakos 1.
Jan 15: Atromitos 0 Aris 0; Kerkyra 0 Asteras 0; PAOK 2 Ergotelis 1; Panionios 1 Panetolikos 0; Giannina 0 Panathinaikos 1.
Jan 18: Levadiakos 1 Aris 1; Panathinaikos 1 Doxa 0.
Jan 21: Asteras 2 Giannina 1; Ergotelis 1 AEK 1; PAOK 1 Panionios 0.
Jan 22: Doxa 1 Aris 3; Panetolikos 1 Kerkyra 1; Xanthi 1 Olympiakos 0; Levadiakos 0 OFI 2; Panathinaikos 1 Atromitos 0.
Jan 25: Doxa 1 Asteras 0; Panathinaikos 3 Levadiakos 0.
Jan 28: OFI 1 Xanthi 0; Panionios 2 Kerkyra 0; Olympiakos 3 Ergotelis 0.
Jan 29: Atromitos 0 Asteras 1; Giannina 1 Panetolikos 0; Aris 2 Levadiakos 1; Doxa 0 Panathinaikos 1; AEK 0 PAOK 2.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	19	15	3	1	38	15	48
Olympiakos	19	13	4	2	42	14	43
PAOK	19	10	5	4	28	15	35
AEK	19	10	4	5	26	20	34
Xanthi	19	8	5	6	24	18	29
OFI	19	8	5	6	21	16	29
Atromitos	18	7	6	5	16	16	27
Aris	19	6	7	6	18	17	25
Ergotelis	19	6	4	9	19	26	22
Panionios	19	6	4	9	17	19	22
Asteras	18	6	4	8	11	19	22
Panetolikos	17	4	5	8	12	19	17
Giannina	17	3	5	9	14	22	14
Kerkyra	17	2	6	9	9	23	12
Levadiakos	15	2	4	9	9	25	10
Doxa	15	1	3	11	3	23	6

30-round season (15x2); teams placed 2nd to 5th will enter play-offs to determine Greece's 2nd Champions League representatives; bottom 3 will be relegated

HOLLAND

Jan 20: Den Haag 3 Roda JC 3.
Jan 21: De Graafschap 0 Heerenveen 2; Excelsior 3 NAC 0; Twente 5 RKC 0.
Jan 22: Vitesse 0 NEC 1; VVV 2 Feyenoord 1; AZ 1 Ajax 1; Groningen 2 Heracles 1; Utrecht 1 PSV 1.
Jan 27: PSV 3 Vitesse 1.
Jan 28: Heerenveen 2 Utrecht 0; NAC 1 De Graafschap 1; Heracles 3 Excelsior 0; Roda JC 2 AZ 0.
Jan 29: Feyenoord 4 Ajax 2; RKC 4 VVV 0; Twente 4 Groningen 1; NEC 2 Den Haag 0.

Storemags.com

Manchester City, scored a hat-trick in his side's 4-2 victory over Ajax to take his record to 14 goals in 13 Eredivisie games.

And Steve McClaren enjoyed a winning return as coach of Twente as his side beat RKC Waalwijk 5-0 with goals from Luuk De Jong (two), Emir Bajrami, Nacer Chadli and Ola John. The Englishman's side are now just two points behind PSV.

Child's play...Ajax fans

ISRAEL

One down, two to go

League leaders Hapoel Kiryat Shmona won the Israeli League Cup, beating Hapoel Tel-Aviv 4-3 on penalties after drawing 1-1 in extra-time.

"It is the first trophy this season and we are still on course to win the other two," said Kiryat Shmona captain Adrian Rochet.

ITALY

Holders go out

Edinson Cavani scored twice as Napoli knocked holders Internazionale out of the Italian Cup at the quarter-finals stage with a 2-0 victory. One bright spot for Inter, however, was the appearance from the bench of Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder after an absence of two months.

Double...Cavani

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	19	12	5	2	52	21	41
Twente	19	11	6	2	52	19	39
AZ	19	12	3	4	37	18	39
Ajax	19	9	7	3	49	28	34
Heerenveen	19	9	7	3	43	28	34
Feyenoord	19	10	4	5	39	26	34
Vitesse	19	8	5	6	24	20	29
Groningen	19	8	5	6	32	33	29
Roda JC	19	9	1	9	34	41	28
Heracles	19	6	5	8	31	27	23
NEC	19	7	2	10	20	27	23
NAC	19	6	4	9	25	32	22
Den Haag	19	6	4	9	25	36	22
RKC	19	6	3	10	21	33	21
Utrecht	19	4	6	9	29	38	18
De Graafschap	19	3	4	12	17	42	13
VVV	19	3	4	12	18	47	13
Excelsior	19	2	5	12	12	44	11

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

ISRAEL

Regular season

Jan 7: Kiryat Shmona 2 Rishon LeZion 0; Beitar 2 Netanya 1; Acre 1 Hapoel Haifa 0; Bnei Yehuda 5 Hapoel Petah Tikva 1; Maccabi Petah Tikva 2 Ashdod 3; Be'er Sheva 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 1.
Jan 8: Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 Ramat HaSharon 1.
Jan 9: Maccabi Haifa 0 Bnei Sakhnin 0.
Jan 14: Netanya 1 Acre 1; Ashdod 0 Bnei Yehuda 0; Rishon LeZion 2 Maccabi Petah Tikva 2; Bnei Sakhnin 2 Kiryat Shmona 3; Maccabi Tel Aviv 4 Be'er Sheva 0; Ramat HaSharon 0 Maccabi Haifa 0.
Jan 15: Hapoel Petah Tikva 0 Beitar 1.
Jan 16: Hapoel Haifa 3 Hapoel Tel Aviv 0.
Jan 21: Hapoel Tel Aviv 7 Netanya 3; Be'er Sheva 2 Hapoel Haifa 0; Acre 3 Hapoel Petah Tikva 1; Maccabi Petah Tikva 1 Bnei Sakhnin 3; Kiryat Shmona 4 Ramat HaSharon 0; Beitar 1 Ashdod 0.
Jan 22: Bnei Yehuda 1 Rishon LeZion 0.
Jan 23: Maccabi Haifa 2 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1.
Jan 28: Netanya 1 Hapoel Haifa 1; Ashdod 1 Acre 1; Rishon LeZion 2 Beitar 0; Bnei Sakhnin 2 Bnei Yehuda 2; Ramat HaSharon 0 Maccabi Petah Tikva 1; Maccabi Haifa 3 Be'er Sheva 1.
Jan 29: Hapoel Petah Tikva 2 Hapoel Tel Aviv 3.
Jan 30: Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 Kiryat Shmona 1.

ISRAEL – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Shmona	23	15	7	1	33	11	52
H Tel Aviv	23	12	6	5	44	21	42
Ashdod	23	11	8	4	30	22	41
Bnei Sakhnin*	23	11	5	7	37	27	36
M Tel Aviv	23	10	4	9	35	26	34
Bnei Yehuda	23	9	7	7	28	20	34
M Haifa	23	9	7	7	38	32	34
Acre	23	9	6	8	36	28	33
Netanya	23	8	7	8	33	35	31
R HaSharon	23	8	7	8	24	30	31
M Petah Tikva	23	6	7	10	23	36	25
Beitar**	23	7	5	11	16	30	24
Be'er Sheva	23	6	4	13	23	41	22
H Haifa	23	5	6	12	22	28	21
Rishon LeZion	23	4	7	12	25	44	19
H Petah Tikva†	23	4	7	12	19	35	10

30-round regular season (15x2): top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 3 will go down)
**2pts deducted for contract irregularities*
***2pts deducted for fans' racial abuse of opposition player*
†9pts deducted for going into administration

ITALY

Saturday, January 7

Internazionale 5 (Milito 13, 41, Thiago Motta 18, Pazzini 56, Faraoni 79)
Parma 0 Att: 47,326

Siena 4 (Destro 11, 81, Calaio pen 35, pen 45+4)
Lazio 0 Att: 10,270

Sunday, January 8

Atalanta 0
Milan 2 (Ibrahimovic pen 22, Boateng 82)
Att: 22,172

Bologna 2 (Cherubin 50, Di Vaio 90+1)
Catania 0 Att: 14,572

Cagliari 3 (Larrivey pen 13, Ibarbo 56, Granqvist og 72)
Genoa 0 Att: 6,000

Lecce 0
Juventus 1 (Matri 27) Att: 23,000

Novara 0
Fiorentina 3 (Jovetic pen 20, 49, Montolivo 42)
Att: 9,000

Palermo 1 (Miccoli 89)
Napoli 3 (Pandev 35, Cavani 54, Hamsik 60)
Att: 22,110

Roma 2 (Totti pen 34, pen 78)
Chievo 0 Att: 40,000

Udinese 4 (Di Natale 1, 82, Asamoah 54, Basta 75)
Cesena 1 (Eder 39) Att: 13,000

Sunday, January 15

Cesena 3 (Mutu 20, pen 39, Rinaudo og 45)
Novara 1 (Morimoto 88) Att: 15,087

Chievo 1 (Sammarco 50)
Palermo 0 Att: 6,000

Fiorentina 0
Lecce 1 (Di Michele pen 66) Att: 18,474

Genoa 3 (Granqvist 49, Jankovic 50, Palacio 71)
Udinese 2 (Ferronetti 13, Di Natale pen 75)
Att: 19,860

Juventus 1 (Vucinic 7)
Cagliari 1 (Cossu 48) Att: 38,293

Lazio 2 (Hernanes pen 20, Klose 90+1)
Atalanta 0 Att: 27,438

Milan 0
Internazionale 1 (Milito 54) Att: 79,522

Parma 3 (Biabiany 24, Valiani 66, Giovinco 90+4)
Siena 1 (Grossi 79) Att: 11,570

Monday, January 16

Napoli 1 (Cavani pen 71)
Bologna 1 (Acquafresca 15) Att: 42,956

Saturday, January 21

Atalanta 0
Juventus 2 (Lichtsteiner 54, Giaccherini 82)
Att: 22,335

Roma 5 (Totti 1, 8, Borini 9, Juan 62, Pjanic 70)
Cesena 1 (Eder 58) Att: 32,347

Sunday, January 22

Bologna 0
Parma 0 Att: 15,141

Cagliari 0
Fiorentina 0 Att: 6,000

Internazionale 2 (Milito 44, Pazzini 63)
Lazio 1 (Rocchi 29) Att: 57,893

Lecce 2 (Esposito 30, Di Michele 90+3)
Chievo 2 (Paloschi 2, 23) Att: 6,543

Novara 0
Milan 3 (Ibrahimovic 57, 89, Robinho 73)
Att: 16,068

Palermo 5 (Budan 26, Silvestre 37, Mantovani 42, Miccoli 75, Migliaccio 84)
Genoa 3 (Palacio 14, pen 59, Jankovic 90)
Att: 15,658

Siena 1 (Calaio 67)
Napoli 1 (Pandev 86) Att: 14,643

Udinese 2 (Izco og 20, Di Natale 53)
Catania 1 (Lodi pen 90+4) Att: 16,064

Saturday, January 28

Catania 1 (Bergessio 33)
Parma 1 (Modesto 43) Att: 13,098

Juventus 2 (Matri 42, 62)
Udinese 1 (Floro Flores 56) Att: 39,265

Sunday, January 29

Cesena 0
Atalanta 1 (Rossi og 76) Att: 15,315

Chievo 0
Lazio 3 (Hernanes 21, Klose 88, 89) Att: 7,000

Fiorentina 2 (Jovetic 4, Natali 63)
Siena 1 (Calaio pen 89) Att: 16,784

Genoa 3 (Palacio 31, 70, Gilardino 36)
Napoli 2 (Cavani 80, Lavezzi 82) Att: 22,428

Lecce 1 (Giacomazzi 40)
Internazionale 0 Att: 14,078

STANDINGS ON JANUARY 30

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	24	2	48
2	Aleksandrs Cekulajevs	Trans Narva (Est)	46	1	46
3	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	22	2	44
4	Robin Van Persie	Arsenal (Eng)	19	2	38
5	Burak Yilmaz	Trabzonspor (Tur)	25	1.5	37.5
6	Seydou Doumbia	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	24	1.5	36
7	Mario Gomez	Bayern Munich (Ger)	17	2	34
8	Klaas-Jan Huntelaar	Schalke (Ger)	16	2	32
9	Demba Ba	Newcastle (Eng)	15	2	30
	Olivier Giroud	Montpellier (Fra)	15	2	30
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Milan (Ita)	15	2	30
	Lukas Podolski	Cologne (Ger)	15	2	30
13	Sergio Aguero	Manchester City (Eng)	14	2	28
	Antonio Di Natale	Udinese (Ita)	14	2	28
	Radamel Falcao	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28
	Robert Lewandowski	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)	14	2	28
18	David Lafata	Jablonec (Cze)	18	1.5	27
	Jeremy Perbet	Mons (Blg)	18	1.5	27
	Artjoms Rudnevs	Lech Poznan (Pol)	18	1.5	27
21	Claudio Pizarro	Werder Bremen (Ger)	13	2	26
	Wayne Rooney	Manchester United (Eng)	13	2	26
23	Mostafa Abdellaoue	Tromso (Nor)	17	1.5	25.5
	Bas Dost	Heerenveen (Hol)	17	1.5	25.5

Victorious...Gil Vicente (in red)

PORTUGAL

Porto miss record

Porto's unbeaten run ended with a 3-1 loss away to Gil Vicente. The defeat left the defending champions one game shy of Benfica's 34-year-old domestic record of 56 consecutive league games without defeat.

Benfica are unbeaten in the league this season, having led at the midway point for the first time in more than 15 years.

RUSSIA

PM's Rescue plan

Struggling Premier League club Tom Tomsk are set to be saved after Gazprom and Rosneft stepped in to help them financially following pressure from prime minister Vladimir Putin. Tomsk were recently banned from signing players due to their precarious financial situation.

SCOTLAND

Hampden date

Scottish Premier League leaders Celtic will meet Kilmarnock in the League Cup Final at Hampden Park on March 18 after beating Falkirk 3-1 in the semi-

Hoop...Celtic's Thomas Rogne

CLUB FOOTBALL

Milan 3 (Ibrahimovic 32, Nocerino 39, Ambrosini 75)
Cagliari 0 Att: 40,242

Palermo 2 (Budan 41, 72)
Novara 0 Att: 16,224

Roma 1 (Pjanic 62)
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 56) Att: 34,073

ITALY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	20	12	8	0	33	13	44
Milan	20	13	4	3	43	17	43
Udinese	20	11	5	4	29	16	38
Lazio	20	10	6	4	30	19	36
Inter	20	11	2	7	30	21	35
Roma	19	9	4	6	29	21	31
Napoli	20	7	8	5	36	24	29
Palermo	20	8	3	9	26	27	27
Genoa	20	8	3	9	28	36	27
Fiorentina	20	6	7	7	20	17	25
Parma	20	6	6	8	25	33	24
Chievo	20	6	6	8	16	25	24
Atalanta*	20	7	8	5	24	25	23
Cagliari	20	5	8	7	16	21	23
Catania	19	5	8	6	22	28	23
Bologna	20	5	6	9	18	26	21
Siena	20	4	7	9	21	22	19
Lecce	20	4	4	12	21	36	16
Cesena	20	4	3	13	13	31	15
Novara	20	2	6	12	18	40	12

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
**6pts deducted because of involvement in match-fixing scandal*

Leading scorers
15 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)
14 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
12 Edinson Cavani (Napoli)
12 German Denis (Atalanta)
12 Miroslav Klose (Lazio)
11 Rodrigo Palacio (Genoa)

ITALIAN CUP

Quarter-finals
Jan 24: Juventus 3 Roma 0.
Jan 25: Chievo 0 Siena 1; Napoli 2 Internazionale 0.
Jan 26: Milan 3 Lazio 1.

PORTUGAL

Jan 6: Setubal 1 Academica 1.
Jan 7: Sporting 0 Porto 0.
Jan 8: Maritimo 2 Olhanense 1; Gil Vicente 0 Nacional 3; Rio Ave 1 Pacos Ferreira 0; Uniao Leiria 0 Benfica 4; Guimaraes 1 Feirense 0.
Jan 9: Beira Mar 1 Braga 2.
Jan 13: Pacos Ferreira 1 Maritimo 1.
Jan 14: Feirense 0 Gil Vicente 0; Benfica 4 Setubal 1; Porto 2 Rio Ave 0.
Jan 15: Nacional 2 Uniao Leiria 2; Olhanense 2 Beira Mar 1; Academica 0 Guimaraes 2; Braga 2 Sporting 1.
Jan 20: Academica 0 Uniao Leiria 0.
Jan 21: Beira Mar 1 Maritimo 2.
Jan 22: Nacional 2 Feirense 0; Pacos Ferreira 2 Setubal 1; Braga 2 Rio Ave 1; Porto 3 Guimaraes 1; Benfica 3 Gil Vicente 1.
Jan 23: Olhanense 0 Sporting 0.
Jan 27: Guimaraes 1 Nacional 0.
Jan 28: Rio Ave 0 Academica 0; Feirense 1 Benfica 2.
Jan 29: Uniao Leiria 2 Pacos Ferreira 4; Setubal 2 Olhanense 3; Sporting 2 Beira Mar 0; Gil Vicente 3 Porto 1.
Jan 30: Maritimo 1 Braga 2.

PORTUGAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	17	14	3	0	43	14	45
Porto	17	12	4	1	38	12	40
Braga	17	11	4	2	32	16	37
Sporting	17	9	5	3	29	14	32
Maritimo	17	8	5	4	24	21	29
Guimaraes	17	7	2	8	23	19	23
Olhanense	17	5	6	6	20	22	21
Academica	17	5	5	7	18	20	20
Gil Vicente	17	4	7	6	17	27	19
Nacional	17	5	4	8	16	27	19
Beira Mar	17	4	4	9	14	16	16
Rio Ave	17	4	3	10	14	23	15
Feirense	17	3	6	8	12	24	15
P Ferreira	17	4	3	10	20	35	15
Uniao Leiria	17	4	2	11	18	33	14
Setubal	17	3	5	9	14	29	14

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ROMANIA

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	18	12	4	2	32	10	40
CFR	18	12	3	3	37	14	39
Rapid	18	11	4	3	30	17	37
Steaua	18	9	5	4	24	14	32
Otelul	18	9	4	5	17	14	31
Pandurii	18	8	6	4	29	18	30
Vaslui	18	9	3	6	28	17	30
Universitatea	18	7	7	4	24	18	28
Astra	18	6	7	5	17	17	25
Ceahlaul	18	5	7	6	16	23	22
Gaz Metan	18	6	3	9	26	31	21
Brasov	18	5	5	8	18	17	20
Petrolul	18	4	6	8	15	21	18
Vointa	18	4	5	9	12	22	17
Tirgu-Mures	18	3	7	8	17	25	16
Sportul	18	2	8	8	17	31	14
Concordia	18	2	5	11	12	32	11
Mioveni	18	2	3	13	12	42	9

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

RUSSIA

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full points and goals record

RUSSIA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	32	18	11	3	61	26	65
CSKA	32	16	11	5	60	33	59
Dynamo	32	17	7	8	53	33	58
Spartak M	32	16	9	7	51	34	57
Rubin	32	15	10	7	44	28	55
Lokomotiv	32	15	8	9	50	34	53
Anzhi	32	14	10	8	40	33	52
Kuban	32	14	8	10	40	30	50

14-round campaign (7x2)

RUSSIA – RELEGATION GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Krasnodar	32	11	9	12	41	45	42
Rostov	32	9	9	14	35	47	36
Terek	32	8	8	16	29	48	32
Amkar	32	7	10	15	23	41	31
Krylia Sovetov	32	7	10	15	22	43	31
Volga	32	8	4	20	25	43	28
Spartak N	32	6	9	17	28	43	27
Tom	32	4	9	19	20	61	21

14-round campaign (7x2): bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SCOTLAND

Regular season
Jan 14: St Johnstone 1 Rangers 2; Aberdeen 0 Kilmarnock 0; Celtic 2 Dundee United 1; Dunfermline 2 Hibernian 3; Hearts 5 St Mirren 2; Motherwell 0 Inverness 1.
Jan 21: St Mirren 0 Celtic 2; Dundee United 1 Motherwell 1; Hibernian 2 St Johnstone 3; Inverness 1 Hearts 0; Kilmarnock 0 Dunfermline 3; Rangers 1 Aberdeen 1.
Jan 24: Motherwell 3 Dunfermline 1.
Jan 28: Aberdeen 1 Dunfermline 0; Inverness 0 St Mirren 0; Motherwell 3 St Johnstone 2; Rangers 4 Hibernian 0.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	24	19	2	3	48	16	59
Rangers	25	18	4	3	47	14	58
Motherwell	24	12	5	7	31	29	41
Hearts	24	10	5	9	30	18	35
St Johnstone	24	10	5	9	32	27	35
Aberdeen	25	7	8	10	27	30	29
Dundee Utd	24	6	9	9	33	38	27
Kilmarnock	23	6	9	8	27	34	27
St Mirren	25	6	9	10	25	36	27
Inverness	24	7	5	12	30	40	26
Hibernian	24	4	6	14	24	45	18
Dunfermline	24	4	5	15	26	53	17

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down)

SPAIN

Saturday, January 7
Levante 0
Mallorca 0 Att: 10,560

Malaga 0
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 26,000

Racing Santander 1 (Bernardo 45)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 10,000

Real Madrid 5 (Benzema 19, 50, Sergio Ramos 34, Higuain 47, Cristiano Ronaldo 89)
Granada 1 (Mikel Rico 22) Att: 78,000

Real Sociedad 0
Osasuna 0 Att: 25,769

Sunday, January 8
Betis 2 (Santa Cruz 23, Jorge Molina 90+2)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 35,000

Espanyol 1 (Alvaro 86)
Barcelona 1 (Fabregas 16) Att: 35,122

Getafe 0
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 11,500

Rayo Vallecano 2 (Michu 45+1, Tamudo 51)
Sevilla 1 (Escude 62) Att: 10,146

Villarreal 2 (Marco Ruben 14, Gonzalo 18)
Valencia 2 (Feghouli 41, Aduriz 87) Att: 18,000

Saturday, January 14
Granada 1 (Fran Rico 87)
Rayo Vallecano 2 (Michu 26, Piti 52) Att: 22,500

Mallorca 1 (Hemed 39)
Real Madrid 2 (Higuain 72, Callejon 84)
Att: 20,000

Sevilla 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 32,000

Valencia 0
Real Sociedad 1 (Griezmann 56) Att: 38,000

Zaragoza 1 (Lanzaro 39)
Getafe 1 (Paredes og 79) Att: 28,000

Sunday, January 15
Athletic Bilbao 3 (Amorebieta 11, Llorente 40, San Jose 90)
Levante 0 Att: 34,000

Atletico Madrid 3 (Falcao 39, pen 51, Diego 80)
Villarreal 0 Att: 48,000

Barcelona 4 (Xavi 10, Messi 12, pen 86, Sanchez 76)
Betis 2 (Ruben Castro 32, Santa Cruz 52)
Att: 82,500

Osasuna 0
Racing Santander 2 (Stuani pen 38, pen 71)
Att: 15,260

Sporting Gijon 2 (Galvez 36, Trejo 90+2)
Malaga 1 (Van Nistelrooy 88) Att: 19,000

Saturday, January 21
Betis 1 (Benat 26)
Sevilla 1 (Negredo 41) Att: 40,000

Espanyol 3 (Baena 26, Verdu pen 45, Rui Fonte 80)
Granada 0 Att: 26,023

Racing Santander 1 (Stuani 14)
Getafe 2 (Gavilan 25, Fedor 83) Att: 10,000

Real Sociedad 0
Atletico Madrid 4 (Falcao pen 3, 82, 90, Adrian 47) Att: 28,000

Sunday, January 22
Levante 0
Zaragoza 0 Att: 10,065

Malaga 1 (Rondon 85)
Barcelona 4 (Messi 33, 51, 80, Sanchez 48)
Att: 30,000

Osasuna 1 (Lolo 90+2)
Valencia 1 (Soldado 85) Att: 17,359

Rayo Vallecano 0
Mallorca 1 (Ramis 57) Att: 9,000

Real Madrid 4 (Marcelo 25, Cristiano Ronaldo pen 47, pen 66, Callejon 85)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 12) Att: 75,000

Monday, January 23
Villarreal 3 (Marco Ruben 57, Borja Valero 59, Bruno 90+1)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 15,000

Saturday, January 28
Espanyol 1 (Weiss 18)
Mallorca 0 Att: 19,740

Rayo Vallecano 2 (Michu 11, Arribas 26)
Athletic Bilbao 3 (Llorente 16, 23, 68) Att: 12,450

Real Madrid 3 (Kaka 32, Cristiano Ronaldo 49, Ozil 56)
Zaragoza 1 (Lafita 11) Att: 75,000

finals. Kilmarnock overcame Ayr 1-0 in extra time in the other semi.

SPAIN

Mirandes march on

Mirandes became only the second side from the third tier to reach the semi-finals of the Spanish Cup, beating Espanyol on away goals with a last-minute strike from Cesar Caneda.

TURKEY

Fenerbahce close gap

Galatasaray's 14-match unbeaten run came to an end with a 1-0 defeat at Bursaspor, Pablo Batalla scoring the goal.

That result allowed fierce Istanbul rivals Fenerbahce to cut the gap on Galatasaray at the top of the table to two points with a 2-1 win against Mersin.

WALES

Halfway stage

The regular season came to an end with the 12-team league splitting into two groups of six: a championship group and a relegation group. Bangor City finished a point clear of The New Saints, with Llanelli, Neath, Bala Town and Prestatyn Town making up the championship group.

Great start...Pabon

COLOMBIA

Apertura kicks off

Dorlan Pabon scored a hat-trick on the opening day of the apertura campaign as Atletico Nacional beat Deportivo Cali 4-0.

Millonarios and Santa Fe drew 1-1 with both goals coming from penalties. Keeper Nelson Perez put Millonarios ahead before Omar Perez equalised.

Villarreal 0
Barcelona 0 Att: 16,500

Sunday, January 29

Betis 1 (Pereira 81)
Granada 2 (Ighalo 12, Carlos Martins 39)
Att: 37,000

Levante 1 (Ruben Suarez pen 90+1)
Getafe 2 (Guiza 32, Diego Castro 82) Att: 14,000

Malaga 2 (Weligton 7, Fernandez 19)
Sevilla 1 (Luna 15) Att: 30,000

Racing Santander 2 (Adrian 2, Bernardo 88)
Valencia 2 (Aduriz 66, 79) Att: 11,494

Real Sociedad 5 (Zurutuza 2, 3, Elustondo 75, Aranburu 90+1, Griezmann 90+3)
Sporting Gijon 1 (De las Cuevas 46) Att: 16,000

Monday, January 30

Osasuna 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Godin 40) Att: 15,010

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	20	17	1	2	70	19	52
Barcelona	20	13	6	1	59	12	45
Valencia	20	10	6	4	31	22	36
Levante	20	9	4	7	26	24	31
Espanyol	20	9	4	7	22	21	31
Athletic	20	7	8	5	30	25	29
Atletico	20	8	5	7	31	27	29
Malaga	20	8	4	8	24	29	28
Getafe	20	7	6	7	22	26	27
Osasuna	20	6	9	5	22	32	27
Sevilla	20	6	8	6	21	22	26
Sociedad	20	6	6	8	22	28	24
Betis	20	7	2	11	23	29	23
Vallecano	20	6	4	10	23	31	22
Mallorca	20	5	7	8	17	25	22
Granada	20	6	4	10	14	27	22
Santander	20	4	9	7	17	25	21
Villarreal	20	4	8	8	18	28	20
Gijon	20	5	3	12	19	38	18
Zaragoza	20	2	6	12	15	36	12

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

24 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
22 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
14 Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)
14 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)
12 Roberto Soldado (Valencia)

SPANISH CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Jan 17-19; 2nd legs - Jan 24-26

Athletic Bilbao v Mallorca 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
Espanyol v Mirandes 3-2, 1-2 (agg 4-4, Mirandes on away goals)
Real Madrid v Barcelona 1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4)
Valencia v Levante 4-1, 3-0 (agg 7-1)

SWITZERLAND

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	18	11	5	2	38	17	38
Lucerne	18	9	4	5	25	15	31
Young Boys	18	7	6	5	26	17	27
Servette	18	7	3	8	25	29	24
Thun	18	6	5	7	21	21	23
Zurich	18	6	3	9	26	26	21
Grasshopper	18	6	1	11	19	36	19
Lausanne	18	3	2	13	16	44	11
Sion*	18	9	4	5	26	17	-5
Xamax (R)**	18	7	5	6	22	22	26

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

**36pts deducted for fielding ineligible players in 12 league games*

***Xamax had licence revoked during winter break after failing to submit the required financial documents. They will be demoted at the end of the season. Their results to date will stand; remaining matches cancelled*

TURKEY

Regular season

Jan 3: Sivasspor 3 Karabukspor 0; Kayserispor 0 Bursaspor 2; Trabzonspor 2 Manisaspor 1; Mersin 1 Ankaragucu 2; Galatasaray 4 Istanbul BB 1.
Jan 4: Orduspor 1 Fenerbahce 1; Genclerbirligi 1 Samsunspor 1; Gaziantepspor 1 Antalyaspor 0; Besiktas 2 Eskisehirspor 0.
Jan 7: Istanbul BB 0 Trabzonspor 2; Bursaspor 1 Mersin 0; Samsunspor 2 Galatasaray 4.
Jan 8: Manisaspor 0 Orduspor 0; Karabukspor 2 Genclerbirligi 1; Eskisehirspor 1 Sivasspor 1; Antalyaspor 1 Kayserispor 0; Ankaragucu 0 Besiktas 0.
Jan 9: Fenerbahce 3 Gaziantepspor 1.
Jan 14: Genclerbirligi 2 Eskisehirspor 1; Galatasaray 5 Karabukspor 1.
Jan 15: Orduspor 1 Istanbul BB 0; Sivasspor 3 Ankaragucu 0; Trabzonspor 4 Samsunspor 0; Mersin 0 Antalyaspor 2; Besiktas 3 Bursaspor 1.
Jan 16: Manisaspor 1 Fenerbahce 2; Kayserispor 1 Gaziantepspor 1.
Jan 20: Antalyaspor 1 Besiktas 2; Gaziantepspor 1 Mersin 0.
Jan 21: Samsunspor 2 Orduspor 0; Istanbul BB 3 Manisaspor 2; Karabukspor 2 Trabzonspor 1; Bursaspor 1 Sivasspor 2; Fenerbahce 4 Kayserispor 0.
Jan 22: Ankaragucu 0 Genclerbirligi 1; Eskisehirspor 0 Galatasaray 0.
Jan 24: Manisaspor 1 Samsunspor 1; Sivasspor 2 Antalyaspor 1; Mersin 1 Kayserispor 2; Besiktas 3 Gaziantepspor 2.
Jan 25: Galatasaray 4 Ankaragucu 0; Orduspor 3 Karabukspor 2; Trabzonspor 4 Eskisehirspor 1; Istanbul BB 3 Fenerbahce 2; Genclerbirligi 2 Bursaspor 2.
Jan 28: Antalyaspor 2 Genclerbirligi 2; Bursaspor 1 Galatasaray 0.
Jan 29: Karabukspor 2 Manisaspor 1; Eskisehirspor 0 Orduspor 1; Samsunspor 2 Istanbul BB 4; Gaziantepspor 2 Sivasspor 1; Ankaragucu 0 Trabzonspor 4; Fenerbahce 2 Mersin 1.
Jan 30: Kayserispor 1 Besiktas 0.

TURKEY – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	23	15	5	3	44	16	50
Fenerbahce	23	14	6	3	38	21	48
Besiktas	23	13	6	4	35	22	45
Trabzonspor	23	11	6	6	41	25	39
Genclerbirligi	23	10	7	6	34	28	37
Sivasspor	23	10	7	6	38	34	37
Istanbul BB	23	9	6	8	32	33	33
Kayserispor	23	10	2	11	25	26	32
Eskisehirspor	23	9	5	9	22	25	32
Bursaspor	23	7	8	8	26	25	29
Antalyaspor	23	7	7	9	20	23	28
Orduspor	23	7	7	9	20	26	28
Mersin	23	7	6	10	23	26	27
Gaziantepspor	23	6	8	9	22	26	26
Manisaspor	23	6	8	9	22	26	26
Karabukspor	23	6	3	14	27	41	21
Samsunspor	23	3	8	12	20	36	17
Ankaragucu	23	2	5	16	17	47	11

34-round regular season (17x2); top 4 will form championship group, 5th to 8th will form Europa League-place group, bottom 3 will be relegated

UKRAINE

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	20	16	4	0	41	8	52
Shakhtar	20	16	3	1	54	12	51
Metalist	20	14	5	1	38	16	47
Dnipro	20	10	3	7	31	25	33
Kryvbas	20	9	4	7	18	19	31
Arsenal	20	8	6	6	23	17	30
Tavriya	20	8	6	6	29	24	30
Metalurh	20	9	2	9	25	22	29
Vorskla	20	6	6	8	25	29	24
Illichivets	20	6	5	9	20	30	23
Chornomorets	20	5	6	9	17	25	21
Volyn	20	5	4	11	18	31	19
Karpaty	20	3	7	10	17	30	16
Oleksandria	20	3	5	12	17	39	14
Zorya	20	3	3	14	15	40	12
Obolon	20	2	5	13	10	31	11

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH AMERICA

BOLIVIA

BOLIVIA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Blooming	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
La Paz	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Mamore	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Nacional	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
San Jose	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Universitario	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Bolivar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Real Potosi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guabira	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Oriente	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
The Strongest	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Aurora	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Standings on Jan 31

22-round tournament (11x2); the team with the worst average points in the combined 2011-12 season (adecuacion, apertura & clausura) will be relegated, teams with 2nd and 3rd worst averages will enter rel/prom play-offs

CHILE

CHILE – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Espanola	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Rangers	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Huachipato	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Univ Catolica	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
O'Higgins	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Cobresal	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
La Calera	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
San Felipe	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
U Concepcion	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Colo Colo	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Iquique	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cobreloa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Univ Chile	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palestino	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Wanderers	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Antofagasta	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Audax Italiano	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
La Serena	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Standings on Jan 31

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

COLOMBIA

COLOMBIA – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Huila	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Tolima	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Cartagena	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Cucuta	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Envigado	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Once Caldas	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Ind Santa Fe	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Junior	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Millonarios	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Quindio	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Ind Medellin	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Itagui	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
La Equidad	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pasto	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Chico	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Patriotas	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Dep Cali	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

Standings on Jan 31

18-round regular season (17x1, plus 1 round of "clasicos"); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

VENEZUELA

VENEZUELA – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lara (C)	17	12	5	0	39	12	41
Caracas	17	11	3	3	27	13	36
Petare	17	10	5	2	28	15	35
Anzoategui	17	9	3	5	16	11	30
Mineros	17	8	4	5	21	22	28
Zulia	17	7	6	4	28	20	27
Yaracuyanos	17	6	6	5	24	17	24
Zamora	17	5	8	4	23	19	23
Aragua	17	5	8	4	15	19	23
Monagas	17	6	3	8	20	23	21
Trujillanos	17	5	5	7	22	21	20
Esppor	17	5	5	7	18	23	20
Tachira	17	5	5	7	14	21	20
El Vigia	17	4	5	8	17	25	17
Tucanes	17	3	4	10	21	30	13
Llaneros	17	2	7	8	18	28	13
Estudiantes	17	1	8	8	15	37	11
Carabobo*	17	1	6	10	17	27	8

No relegation after apertura

**1pt deducted because of violence during home game against Aragua*

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US best...Dempsey

USA

Dempsey wins again
Fulham striker Clint Dempsey was voted the country's player of the year. The 28-year-old, who this season has become the highest-scoring American in Premier League history in England, had previously won the award in 2007. Only Landon Donovan (four times) and Kasey Keller (three) have won the award more times than Dempsey

MALAWI

Final day showdown
Silver Strikers won 1-0 away to defending champions Escom United on the last day of the Super League season to leapfrog their hosts and beat them to the championship by a solitary point. Rodrick Gonani

Banned...Billiat

scored the only goal of the game at the Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre against a team whose preparations had not been helped by the players boycotting training for a week in protest over unpaid expenses.

ZIMBABWE

Match-fixing scandal
A total of 67 players, including several members

VENEZUELA – CLAUSURA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Llaneros	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Zamora	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Lara	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Mineros	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Trujillanos	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Tucanes	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Carabobo	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
El Vigia	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Zulia	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Yaracuyanos	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Anzoategui	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Petare	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
Estudiantes	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Tachira	2	0	1	1	4	6	1
Aragua	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Monagas	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Esppor	3	0	1	2	0	3	1
Caracas	1	0	0	1	1	2	0

Standings on Jan 31
17-round tournament (17x1); bottom 2 in combined apertura/clausura table will be relegated

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw
Isidro Metapan (ESv) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
Monarcas Morelia (Mex) v Monterrey (Mex)
Seattle Sounders (USA) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
Toronto (Can) v Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
1st legs - Mar 6-8; 2nd legs - Mar 13-15

COSTA RICA

Apertura
Final
1st leg - Dec 11; 2nd leg - Dec 18
Alajuelense v Herediano 1-1, 0-0
(agg 1-1, Alajuelense 6-5 on pens)

EL SALVADOR

Apertura
Final
Dec 18: Isidro Metapan 1 Once Municipal 0.

HONDURAS

Apertura
Final
1st leg - Dec 11; 2nd leg - Dec 18
Olimpia v Real Espana 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)

MEXICO

Clausura
Regular season
Jan 6: Morelia 1 Tijuana 1.
Jan 7: Cruz Azul 1 Tigres 1; Queretaro 0 America 2; Monterrey 2 Jaguares 1; Guadalajara 0 Atlante 1; Santos 0 Pachuca 0; San Luis 1 Pumas 0.
Jan 8: Puebla 0 Atlas 0; Toluca 3 Tecos 1.
Jan 13: Tecos 0 San Luis 2.
Jan 14: Jaguares 3 Guadalajara 1; Tigres 1 Queretaro 0; Pachuca 3 Puebla 1; Tijuana 1 Monterrey 0; Atlas 0 Cruz Azul 2; Atlante 1 Santos 2.
Jan 15: Pumas 3 Morelia 0; America 1 Toluca 1.
Jan 20: Tecos 1 America 1; Morelia 2 San Luis 0.
Jan 21: Queretaro 2 Atlas 1; Cruz Azul 1 Pachuca 1; Monterrey 1 Pumas 1; Santos 1 Jaguares 0; Guadalajara 0 Tijuana 2.
Jan 22: Toluca 2 Tigres 1; Puebla 1 Atlante 2.
Jan 27: Morelia 0 Monterrey 0.
Jan 28: Jaguares 0 Puebla 1; Tigres 2 Tecos 1; Pachuca 1 Queretaro 1; Atlas 1 Toluca 0; San Luis 1 America 3; Atlante 2 Cruz Azul 2.
Jan 29: Pumas 0 Guadalajara 0; Tijuana 1 Santos 3.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
America	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Toluca	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Atlante	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Tigres	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Tijuana	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Cruz Azul	4	1	3	0	6	4	6
Pachuca	4	1	3	0	5	3	6
San Luis	4	2	0	2	4	5	6
Pumas	4	1	2	1	4	2	5
Monterrey	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Morelia	4	1	2	1	3	4	5
Puebla	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Queretaro	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Atlas	4	1	1	2	2	4	4
Jaguares	4	1	0	3	4	5	3
Tecos	4	0	1	3	3	8	1
Guadalajara	4	0	1	3	1	6	1

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; the team with worst average points over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

PANAMA

Apertura
Final
Dec 3: Chorrillo 4 Plaza Amador 1.

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw
Amadou Diallo (IvC) v Diables Noirs (Con)
ASFA Yennenga (BuF) v ASO Chlef (Alg)
ASGNN (Ngr) v Tonnerre d'Abomey (Ben)
Brikama United (Gam) v US Ouakam (Sen)
Coin Nord (Com) v Ethiopian Coffee (Eth)
DFC Beme (CAR) v Astres Douala (Cam)
Foullah Edifice (Chd) v JSM Bejaia (Alg)
Green Mamba (Swa) v Platinum (Zim)
Japan Actuel's (Mad) v Power Dynamos (Zam)
LISCR (Lbr) v Berekum Chelsea (Gha)
Mafunzo (Zan) v Liga Muculmana (Moz)
Missile (Gab) v Africa Sports (IvC)
Orlando Pirates (SAf) v Recreativo Libolo (Ang)
Ports Authority (SLe) v Horoya (Gui)
Revenue Authority (Uga) v Correctional Services (Les)
Sony Ela Nguema (EqG) v Dolphin (Nga)
Tusker (Ken) v APR (Rwa)
Vita Club (DRC) v Atletico Olympic (Bdi)
Young Africans (Tan) v Zamalek (Egy)
1st legs - Feb 17-19; 2nd legs - Mar 2-4

Byes to next round
Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Merreikh (Sud), Coton Sport (Cam), Djoliba (Mli), Dynamos (Zim), Esperance (Tun), Etoile Sahel (Tun), Maghreb Fes (Mor), Raja Casablanca (Mor), Stade Malien (Mli), Sunshine Stars (Nga), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw
AC Leopard (Con) v Tempete Mocaf (CAR)
ADR Mansaba (GuB) v Invincible Eleven (Lbr)
Black Leopards (SAf) v Motor Action (Zim)
Dragons de l'Oueme (Ben) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
Extension Gunners (Bot) v Tana (Mad)
Ferroviario Maputo (Moz) v Gor Mahia (Ken)
Gamtel (Gam) v Casa Sport (Sen)
Jamhuri (Zan) v Hwange Colliery (Zim)
Kiyovu (Rwa) v Simba (Tan)
Lydia Academic (Bdi) v Atletico Semu (EqG)
Mangasport (Gab) v St George (Eth)
Nania (Gha) v Sequence (Gui)
Red Arrows (Zam) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
Renaissance (Chd) v Sahel (Ngr)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Unisport Bafang (Cam)
Union Douala (Cam) v Kallon (SLe)
1st legs - Feb 17-19; 2nd legs - Mar 2-4

Byes to next round
Al Ahli Shendi (Sud), Amal Atbara (Sud), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Club Africain (Tun), CO Bamako (Mli), COD Meknes (Mor), CS Sfaxien (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Heartland (Nga), InterClube (Ang), Real Bamako (Mli), St Eloi Lupopo (DRC), Tshinkunku (DRC), Warri Wolves (Nga), Wydad Casablanca (Mor)

IVORY COAST

IVORY COAST – CHAMP'SHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Africa Sp'ts (C)	10	5	4	1	16	8	19
AFAD	10	4	3	3	15	14	15
Sewe Sport	10	4	2	4	10	13	14
SOA	10	2	5	3	9	10	11
Stella	10	3	2	5	8	11	11
ASEC	10	2	4	4	11	13	10

MALAWI

MALAWI – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Silver Strik's (C)	28	14	6	8	60	28	48
Escom	28	14	5	9	38	26	47
Wanderers	28	12	9	7	29	19	45
Civo	28	13	5	10	36	28	44
Moyale	28	13	4	11	51	34	43
Epac	28	13	4	11	41	32	43
Blantyre	28	11	9	8	40	33	42
Blue Eagles	28	12	6	10	30	32	42
Red Lions	28	10	11	7	30	24	41
Tigers	28	12	4	12	41	39	40
Big Bullets	28	10	10	8	29	28	40
Mafco	28	10	9	9	20	31	39
Cobbe (R)	28	7	6	15	27	47	27
Zomba (R)	28	6	4	18	21	51	22
Emb'weni (R)	28	5	4	19	17	58	19

MOZAMBIQUE

MOZAMBIQUE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
L Muc'mana (C)	26	19	4	3	48	18	61
Maxaquene	26	15	8	3	45	14	53
HCB Songo	26	10	11	5	28	13	41
Costa do Sol	26	11	6	9	31	25	39
Ferroviario M	26	10	7	9	36	32	37
Ferroviario N	26	10	6	10	28	26	36
Chingale	26	9	9	8	19	23	36
Vilankulo	26	10	5	11	26	25	35
Desportivo M	26	10	5	11	23	25	35
Ferroviario B	26	6	13	7	21	25	31
Incomati	26	8	5	13	11	25	29
Matchedje	26	7	6	13	21	36	27
At Muc'mano	26	5	6	15	20	37	21
Sporting Beira	26	4	5	17	20	53	17

ZAMBIA

ZAMBIA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Power Dy's (C)	30	18	5	7	49	18	59
Red Arrows	30	14	11	5	41	23	53
Konkola	30	13	11	6	28	18	50
Nchanga	30	14	7	9	23	18	49
Green Buf'loes	30	13	9	8	31	24	48
Zesco	30	13	8	9	33	20	47
Nkana	30	13	7	10	35	29	46
Zanaco	30	12	8	10	37	31	44
Forest R'gers	30	10	12	8	30	26	42
Nakambala	30	12	5	13	24	35	41
Green Eagles	30	9	11	10	21	23	38
Roan	30	8	10	12	27	35	34
Kabwe (R)	30	8	6	16	23	28	30
Lime (R)	30	8	6	16	21	34	30
Nkwazi (R)	30	7	7	16	28	53	28
Kalewa (R)	30	4	5	21	17	53	17

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw
East Asia zone
Pohang Steelers (SKo) v Chonburi (Tha) (Feb 18)

West Asia zone
1st round
Esteghlal (Irn) v Zob Ahan (Irn) (Feb 10)

2nd round
Al Shabab (UAE) v Neftchi (Uzb) (Feb 18)
Esteghlal OR Zob Ahan v Al Ettifaq (Sau)

All preliminary round ties are single-leg only

Group stage draw
Group A
Al Jazira (UAE), Al Rayyan (Qat), Nasaf (Uzb), *Al Ettifaq OR Esteghlal OR Zob Ahan*

Group B
Al Arabi (Qat), Al Ittihad (Sau), Bani Yas (UAE), Pakhtakor (Uzb)

Group C
Al Ahli (Sau), Al Nasr (UAE), Lekhwiya (Qat), Sepahan (Irn)

Group D
Al Gharafa (Qat), Al Hilal (Sau), Persepolis (Irn), *Al Shabab OR Neftchi*

Group E
Adelaide United (Aus), Bunyodkor (Uzb), Gamba Osaka (Jap), *Pohang Steelers OR Chonburi*

Group F
Beijing Guoan (Chn), Brisbane Roar (Aus), Tokyo (Jap), Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)

Group G
Central Coast Mariners (Aus), Nagoya Grampus (Jap), Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SKo), Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Group H
Buriram (Tha), Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn), Jeonbuk Motors (SKo), Kashiwa Reysol (Jap)

Matchdays *Mar 6/7, Mar 20/21, Apr 3/4, Apr 17/18, May 1/2, May 15/16*

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

of the national side, have been suspended by the Zimbabwe Football Association following an investigation into match fixing in the country.

Among those who are banned until further notice are Khama Billiat, Benjamin Marere, Nyasha Mushekwi, Method Mwanjali, Thomas Sweswe, Daniel Vheremu and Ovidy Karuru.

Record...Mariners' Pedj Bojic

AUSTRALIA

Mariners' club best

A-League leaders Central Coast Mariners have set a new club record, taking their unbeaten run to 15 matches to go 10 points clear of Wellington Phoenix at the top.

Coach John Van 't Schip will leave Melbourne Heart at the end of the current season.

THAILAND

Domestic double

League champions Buriram PEA completed the double by beating Muang Thong United 1-0 to win the Thai FA Cup. The goal was scored by 18-year-old Ghanaian striker Frank Acheampong.

Muang Thong United will now miss out on the AFC Champions League.

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Jan 4: Wellington 4 Sydney 2; Melbourne Heart 1 Adelaide 3; Newcastle 3 Gold Coast 2; Central Coast 2 Melbourne Victory 0; Perth 3 Brisbane 3.
Jan 7: Adelaide 1 Brisbane 1; Melbourne Victory 2 Newcastle 1.
Jan 8: Wellington 0 Perth 1; Sydney 0 Central Coast 1; Gold Coast 1 Melbourne Heart 1.
Jan 13: Melbourne Victory 1 Adelaide 1.
Jan 14: Central Coast 1 Newcastle 1; Brisbane 2 Sydney 1.
Jan 15: Melbourne Heart 1 Perth 2; Gold Coast 0 Wellington 1.
Jan 18: Sydney 1 Perth 1; Melbourne Heart 0 Central Coast 1.
Jan 20: Newcastle 0 Wellington 1.
Jan 21: Central Coast 3 Adelaide 2; Melbourne Heart 1 Brisbane 1.
Jan 22: Sydney 2 Gold Coast 1; Perth 4 Melbourne Victory 1.
Jan 25: Adelaide 1 Newcastle 1.
Jan 26: Melbourne Victory 2 Sydney 2.
Jan 28: Brisbane 0 Newcastle 1.
Jan 29: Wellington 3 Melbourne Heart 1; Adelaide 0 Perth 3.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Central Coast	18	12	4	2	30	13	40
Wellington	19	9	3	7	27	21	30
Brisbane	19	8	5	6	34	22	29
Perth	19	8	4	7	26	25	28
Melbourne H	19	7	5	7	28	26	26
Sydney	19	6	6	7	24	29	24
Newcastle	19	6	4	9	22	30	22
Melbourne V	18	4	8	6	23	29	20
Adelaide	19	4	8	7	20	33	20
Gold Coast	17	3	5	9	19	25	14

27-round regular season (9x3); top 6 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

IRAN

IRAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esteghlal	23	14	4	5	37	22	46
Sepahan	23	12	7	4	35	18	43
Teraktor Sazi	23	12	6	5	41	28	42
Saba	23	10	8	5	28	23	38
Naft	23	10	7	6	30	26	37
Foolad	23	9	6	8	25	22	33
Saipa	23	7	9	7	31	24	30
Persepolis	23	7	9	7	30	29	30
Sanat	23	8	6	9	33	39	30
Zob Ahan	23	6	11	6	20	25	29
Malavan	23	6	9	8	23	21	27
Damash	23	7	6	10	25	33	27
Rah Ahan	23	4	13	6	25	28	25
Fajr	23	6	7	10	22	27	25
Shahin	23	5	10	8	20	26	25
Mes Kerman	23	6	6	11	21	27	24
Shahrdari	23	5	9	9	24	31	24
Mes S'shme	23	4	5	14	16	37	17

Standings on Jan 31
34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

PAKISTAN

PAKISTAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KRL (C)	30	24	5	1	54	9	77
Afghan	30	16	9	5	52	24	57
Army	30	17	6	7	35	22	57
WAPDA	30	15	7	8	40	23	52
KESC	30	15	6	9	41	30	51
Muslim	30	15	6	9	40	33	51
P'stan Airlines	30	14	7	9	49	33	49
National Bank	30	14	3	13	41	26	45
Habib Bank	30	10	10	10	34	31	40
Navy	30	8	11	11	34	34	35
Air Force	30	7	12	11	23	29	33
KPT	30	9	5	16	40	58	32
Baloch	30	7	7	16	26	40	28
PMC Athletico	30	7	6	17	17	36	27
Police (R)	30	7	3	20	28	62	24
PEL (R)	30	1	5	24	10	74	8

SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tampines (C)	33	25	3	5	71	25	78
Home	33	25	2	6	81	29	77
Armed Forces	33	21	3	9	74	39	66
Albirex	33	20	5	8	80	34	65
Etoile*	33	21	4	8	65	36	62
Gombak	33	14	6	13	43	41	48
Hougang*	33	15	3	15	55	63	43
Geylang	33	13	2	18	43	63	41
Young Lions	33	7	6	20	33	54	27
Balestier	33	7	5	21	28	63	26
Tanjong	33	3	5	25	21	77	14
Woodlands	33	3	4	26	22	92	13

**5pts deducted*

TAJIKISTAN

TAJIKISTAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Istiqlol (C)	40	35	3	2	130	16	108
Regar-TadAZ	40	30	5	5	108	29	95
Ravshan	40	29	2	9	78	38	89
Energetik	40	21	3	16	78	64	66
Xayr	40	17	3	20	61	59	54
CSKA Pomir	40	16	4	20	65	69	52
Khujand	40	15	6	19	56	72	51
Vakhsh	40	15	5	20	43	51	50
Parvoz	40	12	4	24	45	76	40
Shodmon	40	7	2	31	44	115	23
Guardia	40	3	3	34	32	151	12

THAILAND

THAILAND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buriram (C)	34	26	7	1	64	15	85
Chonburi	34	20	9	5	60	30	69
Muangthong	34	17	9	8	54	32	60
B'kok Glass	34	15	8	11	55	41	53
Pattaya	34	14	11	9	38	27	53
Osotspa	34	12	15	7	47	32	51
Thai Port	34	12	9	13	33	37	45
Tero Sasana	34	13	6	15	39	35	45
Police	34	11	11	12	36	40	44
Chiangrai	34	11	11	12	47	52	44
Phichit	34	12	7	15	38	54	43
Sisaket	34	9	12	13	33	39	39
Army	34	10	9	15	39	40	39
TOT	34	11	4	19	29	55	37
Samut	34	8	12	14	31	45	36
Siam Navy (R)	34	9	6	19	28	52	33
Sriracha (R)	34	7	11	16	33	43	32
Khonkaen (R)	34	6	9	19	33	68	27

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere (NZ)	3	3	0	0	15	0	9
Tefana (Tah)	3	1	1	1	5	12	4
Ba (Fij)	3	1	0	2	3	9	3
Mont-Dore (NC)	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Group B

Jan 18: Auckland City (NZ) 3 Amicale (Van) 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland City	3	3	0	0	9	3	9
Amicale	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Hekari (PNG)	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Koloale (Sol)	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

Remaining matchdays
Feb 17/18, Mar 2-4, Mar 31

Group winners qualify for Final

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland	8	6	2	0	24	5	20
Waitakere	9	6	0	3	29	10	18
Canterbury	9	6	0	3	24	9	18
T Wellington	9	5	1	3	19	11	16
Hawkes Bay	7	3	1	3	13	13	10
Otago	9	3	0	6	7	22	9
Waikato	8	2	1	5	7	21	7
YoungHeart	9	0	1	8	8	40	1

Standings on Jan 31
14-round regular season (7x2); top 4 will enter championship play-offs

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (R) = relegated (Q) = qualified

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

March 6 and 7
AFC Champions League group games start; UEFA Champions League rd of 16 2nd leg
March 6, 7 and 8
Libertadores Cup group games
March 8 to 19
AFC Challenge Cup
March 13 and 14
UEFA Champions League rd of 16 2nd leg
March 13, 14 and 15
Libertadores Cup group games
March 20 and 21
AFC Champions League group games
March 20, 21 and 22
Libertadores Cup group games
March 27 and 28
UEFA Champions League quarter-finals 1st leg
March 27, 28 and 29
Libertadores Cup group games

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THE GREAT TEAMS

West Germany 1972

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The team that would be crowned world champions on home soil in 1974 found their attacking feet two years earlier in Belgium

European champions... after beating the Soviet Union 3-0 in the Final

West Germany were already one of the world's leading sides, having finished as runners-up to England at the 1966 World Cup and then losing an epic semi-final to Italy four years later in Mexico. But coach Helmut Schoen rang the changes for the 1972 European Championship – and in doing so, he created a team with attacking intent which would became European champions for the first time.

Uwe Seeler had retired but Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd Muller remained, and they were joined by Paul Breitner and Uli Hoeness as Schoen crafted a team from the best elements of the Bundesliga's dominant sides, Bayern Munich and Borussia Monchengladbach.

The 1972 Euro semi-finals and Final were played in Belgium, where Germany beat the hosts before overcoming the Soviet Union in the Final. However, the most significant result had been in the quarter-finals, where England were beaten over two legs. A 3-1 win at Wembley in April 1972, where the imperious Gunter Netzer ran the show, ushered in a new era for West Germany.

There was a refreshing fluidity and attacking ambition to Germany's play and they would go on to claim the world title two years later on home soil. As a *World Soccer* editorial in July 1972 concluded: "It is clear that the other European nations are way below the new high standards set by this attacking German side." WS

THE FIRST XI

Sepp Maier
Goalkeeper
Spent his entire career with Bayern Munich and was approaching the peak of his powers.

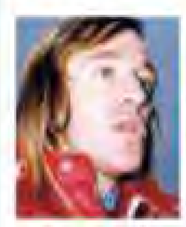
Horst-Dieter Hottges
Right-back
Nicknamed "*Eisenfuss*" (iron foot), he spent 14 years playing for Werder Bremen.

Hans-Georg Schwarzenbeck
Centre-back
Played all his career with Bayern Munich and went on to win 44 caps.

Paul Breitner
Left-back
Flamboyant and outspoken, he would become a key figure for the next decade.

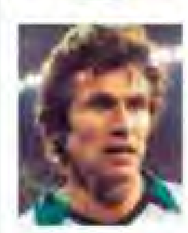
Franz Beckenbauer
Libero
Captain and the team's heartbeat. By now he was well established as a swashbuckling libero.

Herbert Wimmer
Midfielder
A tireless worker from Borussia Monchengladbach, nicknamed "Iron lung".

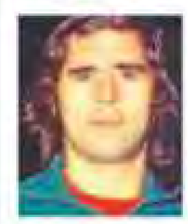


Gunter Netzer
Midfielder
Creative fulcrum and German footballer of the year after winning the league with Gladbach.

Uli Hoeness
Midfielder
Bayern youngster who had only made his international debut in March 1972.



Jupp Heynckes
Forward
Prolific striker for Monchengladbach who would go on to enjoy an extensive coaching career.



Gerd Muller
Forward
"*Der Bomber*" was one of the most ruthless strikers ever seen in the European game.

Erwin Kremers
Forward
Left-winger from Schalke who would win a total of 15 caps for his country.

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Helmut Schoen
The most successful coach in German football history, Schoen worked as an assistant to Sepp Herberger before succeeding his mentor in 1964. When West Germany won the 1974 World Cup, Schoen became the first – and so far only – coach to win European and world titles.

Famous for his cloth cap, he retired after the 1978 World Cup, to be succeeded by his assistant Jupp Derwall.

He died in 1996, aged 80.

Successful...Schoen

Radical rethink of 4-3-3
On paper, West Germany looked far from revolutionary, set up in a standard 4-3-3 formation. But there were radical elements to their playing style and they demonstrated a fluidity that would become a hallmark of the Ajax and Holland sides of the 1970s.

Beckenbauer roamed through defence and midfield, while the two full-backs, Hottges and Breitner, would often switched flanks. Netzer was the schemer, Wimmer and Hoeness provided midfield energy, while Muller was a marauding goal poacher.

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